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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"SURELY YOU HAVE NO BAD NEWS FROM NORA?" ASKED CLAUDE, TAKING GERTRUDE'S HAND.

A TERRIBLE PROMISE.

PROLOGUE.

In the roughly-furnished sitting-room of an up-country hotel in a distant colony, two people sat in earnest consultation; probably they would not have enjoyed the exclusive use of the gloomy apartment, only a travelling company were giving a performance at the clumsy theatre, to which most of the hotel's patrons had gone. The two who were so engrossed with their conversation had had no heart for amusement; it needed only one glance to see that they were in trouble; English people, thousands of miles away from home, with no one in the world to care for but each other. It was easy to guess the anxiety which haunted them was—poverty.

"If I had only two hundred pounds," said the young man, eagerly, "I would give you half, Gerty, to take you back to England, and with the rest I would go on to the gold fields and make my fortune. But I have

not even a five pound note. I was cleared out last night; fool that I was to gamble with those fellows; and the worst of it is I have not only ruined myself, but you. What is to become of us, Gerty? I have not even enough to pay the week's board!"

His sister smiled up into his face as though she would fain encourage him, though hope had well-nigh died in her own heart.

She was a lovely girl of twenty; not so very long ago she had been the sunshine of an English country Rectory; she had clung to her brother at her father's death, and for his sake left friends and country. Wiseacres had shaken their heads, and declared Cecil Monkton was a fast, reckless fellow, not fit to be trusted with the care of a beautiful sister, but Gertrude loved him, and had believed her influence would keep him straight.

And she had failed! Only the night before, half mad under the bad luck which pursued him at the card-table, Cecil Monkton had been ready to take his own life; the pistol had actually been pointed at his breast, when a fellow-countryman, also staying at the hotel,

had suddenly entered the room, just in time to snatch the murderous weapon from his hand.

Perhaps it was of this Gertrude was thinking, as she said, gently:

"Take courage, Cecil, there must be some way out of the difficulty. I feel I can bear any trouble now you have been spared to me."

He stroked her bright hair caressingly.

"You're much too good for me, Gerty; you'd get on a great deal better without such a luckless fellow as I am."

"I won't have you disparage yourself. Tell me, Cecil, is there no one you can ask to lend you the money?"

"Not a creature! Few people here have so much at their disposal, and those that have are too close-fisted."

"You can think of no other plan than for us to part?"

"No. I've been a bad enough brother, Gertrude, but I'm not bad enough to take you among the lawless men up yonder, and

if I can get the money, my best chance is to go there myself."

"And you want me to go back to England?"

"Don't you see, dear, it is the only plan; I may be months and years before I can make a home for you, and you can't live alone in a wild place like this; you have friends in England, too, who would be good to you if you went back to them free from the incubus of a prodigal brother."

"Cecil!"

"Don't cry, dear, I'm not worth it. Gertrude, I've caused you sorrow enough, but if only I could get this money, and make a fresh start, by Heaven, you should be proud of your brother yet!"

She looked up at him with a strange, new light in her lovely eyes; the doubt and uncertainty had left her face now, it was very pale and sad, but her decision was taken.

"You shall have the money, Cecil! I will get it for you."

Something in her tone alarmed him. He looked at her anxiously.

"You won't do anything rash, Gertrude?"

She shook her head.

"I will do nothing, anyone in the whole world could think rash or foolish. You must not ask me any questions, Cecil, but—you shall have the money."

She left the room. Monkton watched her with a strange look of fear upon his handsome, reckless face.

"She means to ask Chatterly for the money! Poor little thing, she does not guess that he is too much of a miser to do even so small a grace for the woman he professes to admire. Perhaps it's as well, I shouldn't like her to be under any obligation to him. I suppose the Earl of Chatterly is a very estimable nobleman, and I am a penniless devil, a disgrace to civilised society, but for all that I haven't much faith in my lord's generosity; I don't believe he knows the meaning of the word."

Gertrude Monkton walked quickly up stairs, almost as though she feared her courage would fail her, and knocked at the door of Lord Chatterly's private sitting-room. The manager of the hotel was rather put out at the Earl's demanding this luxury, but as it happened to be rather a slack time he settled the matter by taking down the bed in the room next that allotted to the Earl, and replacing it by an arm-chair and rickety table, on the strength of which Lord Chatterly had to pay pretty handsomely.

"Come in."

A man of some eight and thirty years, with a dark, somewhat gloomy, face, and grave, almost forbidding, manner, rose as Gertrude entered, and wheeled forward his own arm-chair for her comfort, but the girl shook her head, and remained standing, one hand resting lightly on the rickety table, her beautiful eyes bent down so that they should not meet the Earl's earnest gaze.

"You have come to bring me your answer?" he said, gently, "Is it to be as I wish, Miss Monkton?"

How changed her voice was from the brave, cheering tones which had comforted Cecil only a few minutes before!

"You asked me last night to be your wife," she said, gravely, "and I told you I did not love you, and that while my brother lived I would never forsake him."

Chatterly bowed.

"And I answered you the love would come in time and I was content to wait, while after your brother's last escapade it was impossible you could remain with him."

"I would have stayed with him, I would have gone with him, however distant his journey, but—he will not take me; he says the life at the gold-fields would be too rough for me."

"I am glad he has so much sense. Then, Gertrude, you will make me happy, you will be my wife?"

"I will be your wife, if, knowing I do not love you, you still wish it—but only on one condition."

"I wish it intensely—what is the condition?"

Two red spots burnt on Gertrude Monkton's cheeks. She came of a proud race, she had some pride herself, and it was against every instinct of her nature to ask the boon she yet must ask for Cecil's sake.

"As you know, my brother is a ruined man, his only chance is to seek his fortune at the gold-fields; penniless and friendless, he cannot get there without assistance. If I marry you, Lord Chatterly, you must give Cecil two hundred pounds to start him in his new enterprise."

Lord Chatterly's face was inscrutable, he betrayed not the slightest surprise.

"I will give you the money now," he said, promptly, "you will like to hand it to your brother tonight. I suppose colonial notes will do, he can easily cash them at the bank here?"

She bowed her head. Speech was impossible; something rising in her throat almost choked her; she did not repent what she was doing, she would have done it for Cecil's sake had it been even more repugnant than it was; but all the same, she saw the thing in its true light, she knew perfectly well that she was selling herself, that the roll of bank notes which the Earl handed to her was her price.

She knew Lord Chatterly loved her, he was a rich man, and many people would envy her future prospects; but Gertrude Monkton had not a grain of ambition in her nature, she would rather have worked her fingers to the bone, she would rather have lived on bread and water, than have done this deed, but it was for Cecil's sake.

She found her brother sitting just as she had left him, the same despairing expression on his handsome, haggard face. She bent over him, and kissed his forehead fondly.

"You can start for the gold-fields when you like, Cecil. I have brought you two hundred pounds."

"Gertrude! How did you get it? Surely Chatterly never lent it to you."

"He gave it me. Cecil, I kept back one thing from you, dear; last night the Earl asked me to be his wife."

"And you consented?"

"And I consented!"

Not for worlds would she have let her brother know she had sold herself for his sake, let Cecil think she was already the Earl's fiancée when she went to him for that favour.

"But, dear, I would never have left you while you wanted me; if you would have taken me with you to the gold-fields, why, Lord Chatterly would have had to wait."

"Thirty thousand a year and one of the finest estates in Northshire! You've done well for yourself, Gertrude."

The girl caught her breath hastily. How the words pained her. Cecil thought then she cared for money; that it was for her own sake she had agreed to be Lady Chatterly.

Well, after all, was it not better so; she had meant to hide her sacrifice from him. Better he should think she had grown worldly and mercenary than guess she had blighted her whole future for his sake.

"He wants us to be married at once, and go home to England directly afterwards, Cecil; but for the leaving you, I should be thankful to turn my back on Africa."

"I can hardly take it in, even now," said young Monkton, simply. "You know, Gerty, I can't fancy you a 'great lady,' you always seemed such a gentle little thing, the sort of girl who would go in for the 'love in a cottage' sort of business."

Gertrude Monkton's heart ached. How easy it was to deceive Cecil; but there was

one thing in her own defence she could say, and she said it:

"I wouldn't marry Lord Chatterly if he were ten times as rich as he is if I cared for anyone else—I couldn't; but, Cecil, I think I must be one of those women who go through their lives without loving. I like Lord Chatterly very much, and so I may as well please him by marrying him."

"I can't see what you find to like in him," objected Cecil.

"He is very clever."

"Gerty, a girl doesn't choose her husband for that, but I'm not going to say a word, dear, you must please yourself. I'll say one thing for him, I do believe he worships the ground you walk on. He has no near relation, so you won't find anyone in England to interfere with you, and tell you Chatterly might have done better."

"He told me he was alone in the world," said Gertrude, hesitatingly, "and the last of his family."

"He's the last of the direct line, and it's a precious piece of luck to him that he ever became Lord Chatterly."

"Why, I thought his father was the last Earl."

"Ages, but this man had two elder brothers, and as the lands and fortunes of the family are strictly entailed, he was nearly thirty before he had a chance of enjoying either. The two elder brothers died within a week of each other, and the Honourable Reginald, who had been rather a needy younger son, was suddenly transformed into Viscount Thorne."

"Cecil, I wish you liked him."

"Well, dear, I'm not likely to see much of him, so it doesn't matter particularly. He's been roaming about the world ever since his father's death, seven years ago, so if you can induce him to settle down on his own estate, all Northshire will be grateful to you."

"And when you came back to England, Cecil, you'll come straight to us. Wherever my home is must be yours."

"Hem!" said Cecil, doubtfully, "what will Lord Chatterly say to that?"

"Oh, he'll like what I like, Cecil. Do promise me."

"I'll come to Northshire, dear, when I've made my fortune, but it may take me some time first, and I've a fancy, Gertrude, I shall not show my face in England unless I'm tolerably well off."

The marriage was hurried on, for Lord Chatterly was eager to start for England, and Cecil Monkton wanted to begin his search for fortune at the gold-fields. The brother and sister somehow found very little time for *l'ête-à-l'ête* in those last few days. Both avoided these, indeed, for each was keeping a secret from the other. Gertrude would not let Cecil dream it was for his sake she was marrying this grave, stern-faced earl, and her brother would not tell her of a certain conversation the peer had with him, when they first met after the engagement. Had the girl only guessed one half of it she would have broken her bonds even at the eleventh hour.

"Remember," said the Earl, sharply, "I won't have my wife pestered with begging letters from poor relations. If you don't succeed at the gold-fields, you are not to write piteous stories to Lady Chatterly."

Cecil smiled a little scornfully.

"You need not be afraid, my lord, I never yet begged of a woman. Unless I become a rich man, neither you nor Gertrude will hear of me again."

Lord Chatterly's beautiful home in Northshire had been shut up for seven years. It was the opinion of the villagers that their landlord had had time to travel all round

the world, when the news came that the Earl was on his way home, and to the intense surprise of the whole neighbourhood he did not return alone. He entered the grand old hall with a lady on his arm, and presented her to the housekeeper and butler as his wife.

You might have knocked that worthy pair down with a feather, so unexpected was the announcement. There was nothing prepared for a countess, since not the least suspicion of the Earl's marriage had reached Northshire. Mrs. Jordan stood literally aghast, not knowing what to do with the new mistress, but the bride saw her dismay and said gently:

"Pray do not trouble, I know you did not expect me, and am sorry we could not give you notice, but I am sure I shall be comfortable anywhere in this beautiful old house."

Mrs. Jordan found her voice.

"If we'd only known, my lady! There's not a bit of fire in this drawing-room, and all the furniture's still in its holland covers, for the Earl always uses the library."

Upstairs, in her own room, despite her brave front below, Gertrude burst into tears. Was not this strange, unwelcome homecoming an ill omen for the happiness of her married life?

CHAPTER I.

In one of the poorer parts of Paris there lived a little family, English by birth, all three, but two of whom had never seen any land but France, while the third was an old lady of seventy, who had never crossed the Channel since she came to Paris a young woman of twenty-two, to earn her bread as English teacher in a French school.

She married a few years later, and was left a widow with one child, a very beautiful girl, who made, what M^{rs}. Le Comte thought, a very brilliant match, since her husband, Mr. Charles, was young, amiable, handsome, and so rich that he had no need to work for his living.

Madame Le Comte lived with this young couple, loved and cared for by both, but the happiness of the little family was not to be unclouded. Mr. Charles was summoned to England on important business, he left promising his wife to write every day, and to return in a week at latest. Not one week, but three passed; no letter came; no word or sign of the absent husband arrived. Marguerite Charles and her mother were full of intense anxiety. The wife believed only illness would have kept her husband from her. Poor Madame Le Comte remembered with alarm that they knew absolutely nothing of Mr. Charles's relations or position. What if he came of some grand family who were trying to estrange him from his humble home! At last, when hope deferred had well-nigh broken Marguerite's heart, news came, not from the missing man, but from a relation of his, who signed himself Kenneth Ford.

Mr. Ford broke the news of Mr. Charles's death very gently. He said his cousin had been injured in a railway accident, and only recovered consciousness an hour before he died—too late to send for his wife and child. Mr. Ford went on to say that, though far from a rich man himself, he was anxious to be of some assistance to his cousin's widow, and would come to Paris to see Mrs. Charles as soon as he had recovered sufficiently from the shock to feel able to meet a stranger.

He was never troubled to make the journey; within twelve hours of that fatal letter Marguerite and her baby boy lay dead together. Poor Madame Le Comte was left with her twin grand-daughters totally dependent on her.

As soon as she could command her feelings

she wrote to Mr. Ford, hoping he would offer to do something for the little girls, and he replied very promptly. He was a bachelor and could not offer the child a home, but if Madame Le Comte would undertake the charge of it, he would contribute eighty pounds a year towards her expenses.

Evidently from his letter he had misunderstood Madame Le Comte, and thought the baby who died with its mother was one of the twin children he had heard of, and that only one child now survived, but this troubled the grandmother very little, since, with economy, his generosity would quite suffice for the two.

The money came most regularly, but their benefactor never showed the slightest interest in the little girls. There were times when the doting grandmother felt inclined to resent his indifference, but then she reflected—deeds spoke louder than words, and after all an old bachelor could not be expected to feel much affection for children he had never seen.

Years passed, changing the twins into well-grown girls of twenty, and adding many wrinkles to Madame Le Comte's pleasant face. She began to feel herself a very old woman, and was continually urging the girls to choose some career for themselves, when suddenly, without a word of warning, a terrible catastrophe occurred. Kenneth Ford's allowance, which for eighteen years had come punctually to the day, abruptly stopped. The old grandmother waited a few days in growing anxiety, and at last wrote to a lawyer who had once been employed to send the money while Mr. Ford was abroad.

The reply came quickly, but was hardly satisfactory; Mr. Ford was alive and well, but he had given the lawyer no instructions to forward any money to France.

The poor old woman sat aghast as she read this letter; she had lived very carefully, but to educate the girls cost something, and she had not much more than ten pounds in the bank.

There was only one person she could consult; Dr. Bolton, the English physician who had attended poor Marguerite on her death-bed, he knew the whole story of Mr. Charles's sad death in England, and Kenneth Ford's generosity; he had always been a warm friend to the twins, and now he had a warmer interest in them, for his nephew was in love with Nora, and it was only a want of means which prevented a formal engagement; meanwhile, the young couple "understood" each other, and waited hopefully until Claude Disney should become a duly qualified physician.

Madame Le Comte put on her funeral black bonnet, which had seen four summers' wear, and went round to Dr. Bolton the very day she received the lawyer's letter. The physician was at home, leaning back in an easy chair in the little salon; his wife, with her knitting, sat opposite. Both looked the picture of repose, but they roused themselves at once to listen to Madame Le Comte's troubles.

"Has the money ever been late before?" asked the doctor, after reading the letter.

"Never once!"

"Do you imagine Mrs. Ford has kept count of the girls' ages, and thinks now they are twenty they ought to earn their living?"

"I have never had a line from Mr. Ford since the year my daughter died," said Madame Le Comte, with a sigh. "For a few years a Mr. Wedgwood, the writer of this letter, sent the money; then he always sent his card, but for the last few years it has come in bank-notes in a registered envelope without a word inside."

"But you always acknowledged it?"

"Always!"

"I should write to Mr. Ford," suggested

Mrs. Bolton, "you ought to know what to expect."

"I'm afraid it will come to their having to turn governesses," said the doctor, gravely; "this Mr. Ford is evidently getting tired of his generosity; it will be some years before Claude is able to marry, and, besides, there is Beatrice."

"If one of the girls has to be a governess," said the old lady, "I should like her to go to England; poor Mr. Charles came of a good family, Kenneth Ford is his own cousin. If he is weary of supporting the children he might be willing to recommend one of them to some of his friends as governess; the name is different, and if their cousin is ashamed of their poverty they need never mention the relationship."

"And you had better send Nora," said the doctor, quietly; "Beatrice has such a talent for music she might get some pupils, but Nora could never walk about Paris by herself, she is too pretty and childlike."

There was a long silence after Madame Le Comte had left; then Mrs. Bolton said, suddenly:

"John, do you remember your old suspicions of Kenneth Ford, how you fancied he was no 'cousin,' but Mr. Charles himself, who, grown weary of his humble ties, wanted to pose as a bachelor among his grand friends—do you think so still?"

"I don't know what to think," said the doctor, in a puzzled tone; "I was sure enough of it at the time."

"And now?"

"Then, you know, I had no proof, I was influenced by the air of mystery which hung over Mr. Charles; then I searched the English papers, and no 'Charles' died at that time; besides, I did not believe any man would spend eighty pounds a year on the children of a first cousin."

"And what has changed your mind?"

"If it was their father he would not stop the allowance, for the one thing Mr. Charles would dread would be a meeting with Madame Le Comte, and by cutting off her income he would risk her starting for England to seek his help."

"You mean if Kenneth Ford is Mr. Charles he is a villain, and it would be worth his while to pay eighty pounds a year not to be found out?"

"Yes, I think I shall write as well as Madame Le Comte. If the man is really a philanthropist he won't grudge eighty pounds a year when he hears a whole family lives on it."

Both the letters were sent, and Mr. Ford replied to them very graciously. He thanked Dr. Bolton for his information; he did not wish to inconvenience Madame Le Comte, but he was not a rich man, and he thought Beatrice Charles must now be of an age to assist herself. He knew of an excellent situation he believed she could fill, and was sending all particulars of it to her grandmother.

"I think he means to be nice," said Beatrice to her sister, "but why will he speak of us as if we were one, and why doesn't he write from his own house?"

"Everyone in England writes at a club," said Nora; "Do you know, Trix, granny says I must be the one to go?"

"Don't you think she would send me instead if we both begged her. It seems so hard on Claude to lose you."

Nora shook her pretty head.

Claude says he wants me to go; he is dreadfully jealous, Trix; he hates me even to walk down the street alone, and he fancies I shall be better looked after in England and—I like the idea of going."

Beatrice shivered.

"We have never been parted in our lives—I hate the thought of it!"

"But I always wanted to go to England—"

and I want to see cousin Kenneth." She paused a moment. "If he is a nice, kind old gentleman, and took a fancy to me, he might buy Claude a practice."

"I don't believe he's nice," said Trix, "he has only given us money to spare himself worry; he has thrown us charity just as people toss a bone to a dog."

They did not have long to discuss the future, another letter from Mr. Ford announced that his friend, Mrs. Masterton, consented to receive his young cousin, and that if Nora would start the following Monday he would meet her at Charing Cross, and see her safely to her journey's end. He enclosed twenty pounds for any incidental expenses, and also a note from Mrs. Masterton, which set forth her willingness to receive "Mr. Ford's young cousin." The lady said she required a companion for herself quite as much as a governess for her little girl; Miss Charles would be quite one of the family, and they would all try to make her happy at "The Firs."

"I wonder where she lives," said Beatrice, after turning to the top of the first page, which was adorned by the name of Mrs. Masterton's house, but no further address.

"I like her letter, Nora."

"So do I," said Nora, decidedly, "but poor cousin Kenneth still seems mystified about us, in one part of his letter he speaks of his 'young relative' as Nora, in the other Beatrice. What does it mean, Trix?"

It was Madame Le Comte who explained. The mistake had arisen eighteen years ago, when she wrote to tell Mr. Ford her daughter and the baby had died together; he had supposed the letter was one of the twins, of whom he had heard from their father.

"I never wrote to put him right," said the old lady, "it would have seemed like asking him to do more for you, and eighty pounds a year was enough for the two, with economy; you must explain it all to Mr. Ford Nora, dear, when you see him."

Everyone approved of Mrs. Masterton's note. Claude thought it charming, and that his pretty little *fiancée* would be safe and well cared for until he could claim her. The doctor's wife helped Madame Le Comte to spend the twenty pounds to the best advantage, so when Monday came Nora possessed quite a pretty outfit.

They all went down to the station to see her off; according to French custom, they did not gather on the platform, but in the large *salle d'attente*, whose doors were only opened when the train was ready.

"You will remember your home, *petite*, and not forget us," pleaded the old grandmother.

"Write very soon," whispered Beatrice, "and tell us everything."

While Claude, in a low tone, spoke of how hard he should work to make a home for his darling, and Mrs. Bolton kindly kept Trix and Madame Le Comte a little way apart that the young lovers should have just a word alone.

"You are content to go, dear?" asked Claude, "It's not too late to change your mind even at the eleventh hour."

"I'm longing to go, Claude. I've wanted to see England ever since I can remember."

They all liked to remember afterwards that Nora had wished to go; at least, in the dark after-time they had not to reproach themselves with having persuaded her against her will to undertake that fatal journey.

She was placed in a "ladies' carriage," under the special protection of the guard, and then the four who were left set off on their long walk back to the Rue St. Denis.

The two elder ladies were behind; Claude gave his arm to Beatrice, he could feel the trembling of her hand and guessed she was near tears.

"Don't fret, Trix, it won't be for long; I mean to work like a nigger, and in a year or two I hope to have a home ready for Nora."

Beatrice did not seem consoled, but she only said, anxiously:

"I hope Nora will be happy; Mrs. Masterton's letter seemed very kind."

"Yes. By the way, I forgot to ask Nora for the address, it was not on the letter."

"The Firs."

"Trix, that's only the name of the house, it might be in Northumberland or Cornwall. Surely you know where your sister has gone!"

Trix felt inclined to resent the blame in his tone, though the omission of the full address had annoyed her too.

"Nora promised to write to-morrow."

"But if you wanted to telegraph to her?"

Trix laughed.

"That's not likely. She will be at Charing Cross at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and our cousin, Mr. Ford, will meet her, and take her to 'The Firs'; I think we might hear by Wednesday, but I don't mean to expect a letter till Thursday."

Claude looked in on Wednesday night just to ask "if the letter had come." He found Trix alone, for Madame Le Comte had gone to bed with a bad cold, caught no doubt at the draughty station. Beatrice was at needlework; her eyes were red with weeping and there was no smile of welcome on her face.

"Surely you have no bad news from Nora?" he cried, taking her hand with brotherly affection.

"We have not heard at all, Claude."

"Then what are you fretting about?"

"I can't help it," cried Trix, with a smothered sob, "I do miss Nora so, we have never been parted before in our lives. I kept up pretty well yesterday, but when to-day's post brought no letter I just gave way."

Young Disney never attempted to blame her, he looked round the dreary little room and guessed how lonely she must feel without her twin, then he gently reminded her she had said she should not expect a letter before Thursday.

"I know. I think granny upset me most. She was listening for the postman, too, and when he passed she wrung her hands and said it would be like my father over again. Nora was always her favourite, and I suppose she said just what came into her head, without thinking how it would pain me."

"Your father died from the effects of a railway accident," said Claude, cheerfully, "and there was no accident to Monday's steamer. A patient of ours has a son who crossed Monday night, and she has heard of his safe arrival at Charing Cross, so you may put that fear aside. Now, what else are you worrying over?"

"You will say it is my own fault."

"No, I won't."

"I wish we had Mrs. Masterton's full address."

"You said it did not matter! Nora is sure to put it on her first letter."

"Yes, but it's granny; she will keep on about my father and saying it is his case over again. He went to England on a Monday, he left no address, but promised to write at once. You must have heard the story, Claude; for days and days they waited for that letter—and it never came."

"Now, look here," said Claude, authoritatively, "you'll be in a nervous fever if you go on like this; I'll fetch you a sleeping-draught, you must drink it at once, and then go straight to bed. When you wake up it will be almost post-time, and, depend upon it, you will have a letter from Nora, full of her first impressions of England."

He meant well, but he was so afraid of making the sedative too strong for a girl

utterly unused to such things that the dose was not powerful enough to procure sleep, but only excited the weary brain instead of soothing it.

No night had ever been so terrible to Beatrice Charles. If she closed her eyes, awful visions pursued her in her sleep, if she kept awake, anxiety for her sister made her well-nigh frantic; at last, towards morning, she fell into a heavy dreamless sleep, and awoke from it weary and unrefreshed, to find that it was so late the postman might come at any moment.

Throwing on her dressing-gown, Trix went to her window, which looked into the street. Yes, there was the postman leaving a letter four doors higher up, he was coming nearer, nearer—she could see him at the very next house—and then—he walked deliberately past their door down the street!

Thursday morning had come, Nora had been absent since Monday, and there was no letter from her!

(To be continued.)

ADA GRAY'S ORDEAL.

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CHAPTER V.—(continued.)

"It is the best they have in the house, Miss Ada," Jane explained, apologetically; "and I thought it would be best to bring you where there would be no danger of your being recognised. Won't you sit down and let me take off your hat and gloves? Why, Miss Ada, you are as cold as ice!"

"No, I'm not; I'm burning up! But what does it matter? Oh, heaven! what does anything matter now?"

"Don't talk like that, dear! It can't be so bad as you think. Nothing ever is so bad as we think. Of course, I would never presume to advise you, because I am only your servant—"

"No; my friend, Jane—the only friend I have now. But you must not remain here, child. You must go back home. If he hears that you have come away with me, he will discharge you, and—"

"He? Who?"

"My father."

"I don't know what you are talking about, Miss Ada, but I shall never go back there until you go."

"You don't know what you are saying. Didn't I tell you that I have got to face the world alone? Didn't I tell you that I have got my own living to make, even as you have yours?"

"Yes, I know," answered the girl, doggedly; "but while you might make your living, you could never put on your own shoes and fasten your clothes and brush your own hair. It is ever so much easier for a lady like you to make her own living than it is to dress herself in the morning, Miss Ada. You never have done it, and you could not if you were to try."

"But I may fail in making the living, also, and then we should starve, Jane."

"I am not afraid of starving, Miss Ada, and if it is to come to that, you will need someone to take care of you all the more, you know. Please don't send me away, for I shouldn't go if you did, and I have never disobeyed you in my life. I don't like to begin just at this time."

"Do you mean that you are going to stick to me in spite of everything?"

"In spite of everything, Miss Ada!"

She was only a servant, but Ada's longer remembered that. She flung her arms about the neck of her faithful friend, and burst into tears.

Jane let her weep on for some time without reproach, then she gently patted her on the head, as she might have done to a little child, and whispered, soothingly:

"There, there, dearie; Let me put you to bed. You will be all the better for a good sleep, and in the morning we can talk it all over. It can't be so bad as you think."

Ada sat up and dried her eyes; the tears seemed to have done her a world of good.

"I know that I am acting like a baby," she said, with an hysterical attempt at a smile, "but one can't always help it. But I am not going to do it any more. Because there are two false, wicked men in the world, and one bad woman, that is no reason why everybody under the sun is wicked. Have I not you as proof against them. No one could be better than you. I want to kiss you, Jane."

"Oh, Miss Ada, don't do that!" she exclaimed, in a low, constrained voice. "It is very good of you to let me stay and take care of you, but I am only your servant, you know; and—"

"And my dear friend, as you shall always be, let what will happen. Have you not stood my friend when my own father deserted me?"

"But he won't, child," cried the woman, earnestly, "he won't do that. You are both a little angry now. You have both said things that you do not mean. To-morrow I will go to see him, and he will send for you."

"If he sent for me ten thousand times I should never go while that woman is beneath his roof. Do you know who it is that he has married? My mother's rival—the wretched creature who broke her heart!"

"And what is she to Mr. Clinton, Miss Ada?"

The girl flushed deeply.

"I don't know," she answered, her face expressing the humiliation she felt, "You heard her call him darling."

"And you don't think you ought to inform your father of that fact?"

"Ada was silent for a moment, then she arose suddenly from her chair and began pacing the floor rapidly. She said nothing for some time, and appeared to be thinking deeply, then she turned swiftly to her maid.

"No!" she cried, hurriedly, "I am not a spy, a cheat, a detective. He must know her. He knew what she was to him when his wife lived. Why should he think her different to another man, now that she is his wife? It is an old Mosaic law, 'An eye for an eye,' Jane. Let him find it all out for himself, and it will sting all the deeper. And he will find it out! I can afford to wait for my revenge. It will come in Heaven's own time."

"I think you are right, Miss Ada. But have you thought what the world will say?"

"I have not thought, and it would do no good if I were to think. My father has cast me adrift. I could no longer supplicate alms of him than of the veriest stranger that walks the streets. When necessity is staring one in the face, one cannot afford to pause to think of what the world will say."

"But what is there you could do, Miss Ada?"

"That was decided for me by my dear mother before she died. I think she must have foreseen that something like this would happen to me, and prepared for it. She knew her husband even better than I thought. Great Heaven! what she must have suffered! I shall know how to make my living, Jane. I shall be a journalist."

"A journalist!"

"Yes. No fear, Jane, I can feel success strong within me. It may be uphill work at first; but I shall not—I will not fail. I will convince them that they have not thrown out a helpless child, who will come back to them crying out for bread, and ready to

do anything, accept anything, rather than starve! It is a bitter trial, Jane; but I shall neither grieve nor die. I shall show them that I am a woman, strong enough to do battle with the world and come out the victor. I thank Heaven that my eyes were opened to Arthur Clinton's treachery before it was too late. I am not afraid, Jane, and I will convince others through my strong belief in myself. I cannot but regret that my father is a madman, but I will not grieve for the loss of a lover who is a scoundrel. The past is behind me, Jane; I am ready for the future."

CHAPTER VI.

But it was not an easy thing to do—that upon which Ada Gray was determined. She was young and full of hope. She was possessed of a high moral sensibility that scorned deception almost more than any crime in the catalogue. She was of that Quixotic temperament that condemns even the appearance of evil.

Perhaps that experience through which her mother had passed, and in which Ada had been her companion, had done much to make the girl what she was, but there was nothing tolerant in her nature of the sins to which man is tempted. She looked upon Arthur Clinton as a man does upon a lost and abandoned woman. Her indignation was scarcely greater than her contempt.

And yet, believing that he had lied to her and deceived her, she could not close her heart against him. She loved him with all the strength of an overwhelmingly strong nature, but she believed that it was even stronger than it was. She thought she had but to will to forget him, and the deed would be done; but she found herself staring up at the ceiling with peculiar persistence during all the hours of that seemingly endless night, suffering as she had never believed it possible for a woman to suffer.

That is the suffering to which poets refer when they tell you to "suffer and grow strong."

"Why should I care?" she asked herself, angrily. "He is false—false and wicked! He is guilty of the crime that broke my mother's heart! Why should I grieve for a wretch like that?"

But self-questioning did no good; she did grieve, wildly, passionately. But with the morning the hope of youth returned. Nor was it the hope of youth alone; it was the desire to show, both to Arthur and her father, that she could live without them. She wanted to convince them that it was no helpless child upon whom they had trodden; she wanted to show them that she could succeed, and that she would; she wanted to show Arthur Clinton that she had never really cared for him—he who could go from her arms straight to those of another woman.

And as the hours of the day increased, ambition gained strength in her heart. She sat down after she had eaten her breakfast, and made her plans as methodically as if she had been accustomed to thinking out the road to earning a living all her life. With the darkness, every trace of weakness had gone from her.

Jane had feared she would give way, but when she looked into the eyes of her mistress she felt that she was wrong.

"Heaven bless her!" she muttered, "I hope I may never see that look of determination and courage dimmed by despondency and heart-ache. But it will be a miracle if it is not so. The world is a strong opponent, particularly against beauty and youth. She does not foresee the heat of battle through which she must pass; she does not see the gore of slain hopes, of crippled ambitions, of lost youth. Heaven pity her!"

But the faithful creature knew that it would be worse than useless to speak those thoughts aloud.

"I want you to dress me carefully this morning, Jane," Ada said, almost brightly; "I am going to the office of 'The Mercury.'"

"Shall you take me with you, Miss Ada?" She thought a moment, then replied.

"I think not."

"You would surely not go down there among all those men alone?"

Miss Gray laughed just a trifle hysterically. "Why not?" she asked. "If they engage me, do you think I could have you going down there with me every day? It would be a sort of double-barreled journalist, wouldn't it? No, Jane, I must get used to facing situations alone, and it is much better that I should begin it at once."

The maid did not reply, that would have been useless also, and Jane was a sensible woman. She dressed her mistress carefully, and was about to order a cab, when Ada stopped her.

"No luxuries now, Jane," she said, with a smile that was rather too quivering to be straight from the heart. "You don't know what may happen, and we must husband our little money carefully. The omnibus will be good enough for me this morning."

"What time do you think you will return, Miss Ada?"

"It is impossible to say. Perhaps an hour, perhaps six. Why?"

"I thought I might go out and look around to see if I could not find a quiet place for us to live. This is retired enough, but still a hotel."

"You are right. Go, by all means. Get a lodging. Something inexpensive but nice, you know. We can't afford hotels now. Oh, you shall see what a capital financier I shall make! Good-bye, Jane."

"Good-bye, Miss Ada, and good luck!"

There was something mournful in the woman's tone that made Ada's heart quiver with dread for a moment; but she quickly shook it off, and walked briskly out into the bright sunshine.

Her courage had not failed in the least when he walked up to the desk in the "Mercury" office, and asked the man there if she might be permitted to see Mr. James Flint, the editor-in-chief, but it oozed away just a trifle when he glanced at her indifferently, and exclaimed:

"Your card, please."

She gave it in silence, and trembled slightly when the man said:

"Will you state your business?"

She hesitated a moment, then answered, bravely:

"Mr. Flint knows me. I don't think it will be necessary that I should state my business."

The man was more considerate at once. He put the little card in a big tube, pushed it down; there was a whirring noise, then the man's attention was turned to someone else.

How confusing it all looked as she stood there watching the scene! Men came and went, half knocking each other down in their haste to move along, never apologizing or appearing to take any note whatever of one another's rudeness. Some of them stared at her curiously, one or two smiled and made a motion as if to raise their hats, and others passed without seeing her at all. There were women in the throng also, women in just as great haste as the men, just as rude, just as thoughtless of anything save their own business. And they hurried and pushed and jostled one another until Ada was half frightened, wholly confused.

For, be it remembered, she was a rich man's daughter, a girl reared in the seclusion of a luxurious home, where even the atmosphere was tempered with the courtesy of flowers. She was not a fool, but this was a phase of life that she knew nothing of.

She was standing there huddled against the desk, trying to keep herself as much out of sight as possible, when the man behind the desk startled her by shouting at her:

"Mr. Flint will see you. Lift to the right—third floor—Room 16."

She looked about her, bewildered, uncertain. There were two or three lifts to the right. She summoned courage, at last, and approached a policeman whom she saw standing there.

"I want to go to Mr. Flint's office. Will you tell me which lift to take?" she asked.

He directed her, and she got in. It was packed almost instantly, and started swiftly up. She was deposited on the third floor, and with a sigh of relief she found there were few people on that floor. She looked about her, and after a moment found the number. She knocked timidly upon the door, and opened it in response to an invitation to "come in."

James Flint rose from his desk and extended his hand.

"This is indeed an honour, Miss Gray!" he exclaimed, "I am delighted. So you have taken advantage of my many times repeated invitation to come down and see our wonderful building, have you?"

"No, I have not!" she cried, so glad to find herself beside someone whom she knew, that all her courage was instantly revived, "I have not come to see the building, but I have come to test another oft repeated invitation of yours, expressed then; perhaps, in fun, but which I am going to ask you to mean now."

"And that is—?"

"You have said that I should make a clever reporter. I have come to ask you to take me upon your staff."

In his astonishment he sat down and looked at her, forgetting to offer her a chair.

"To take you upon my staff?" he repeated, in amazement.

"Yes," she cried, a sob rising in her throat, "You yourself were the first to suggest it. You have told me laughingly that you would give me a position whenever I came to you for it. Now I have come. Are you going to keep your word?"

"But, my dear child, you are mad! What has put this foolish idea into your head? Have you not enough admiration now, that you wish to—"

"I beg of you not to put it like that! It seems an insult, a degradation to me. I am not seeking notoriety. I am acting upon necessity. Will you give me the position, or must I seek it elsewhere?"

"But your father?"

She hesitated a moment, then cried out:

"There is no reason why I should not tell you, when the whole world will know it in a week, perhaps. I have left my father's roof for ever! He has married a woman whom I could not receive in my dear mother's place. We have quarrelled and separated. The necessity of which I spoke is that of making my own living. Now, Mr. Flint, will you prove yourself a man of your word, and at least try me on your reporting staff?"

CHAPTER VII.

Although accustomed to reading the expressions of men with peculiar acuteness, James Flint saw nothing in the words and manner of Ada Gray except what he mentally termed "the prattle of an angry child."

It never occurred to him that she really intended to try to earn her own living, and it never occurred to him that she could do it if she were to try. He had admired her skill in stenography; he had complimented her clear and forcible ideas upon the leading topics of the day as he might have admired and complimented a handsome gown that she wore. It was one thing to tell a beautiful society girl that she would make a clever

reporter, but quite another to take her in that capacity upon the staff of one of the largest dailies in the great city of London.

But James Flint was a clever man. He saw readily enough that she was angry, and that, for the time at least, she meant what she said. He knew that if he should refuse her employment upon his paper, there would be others ready to offer it to her, simply for the benefit that her name would be to the paper.

Ada was not sufficiently a business woman to understand that. She believed that she must pass simply upon her ability, in the line she had chosen, forgetting that the name of a girl who had ruled as queen in the world of fashion would be of any benefit to the sale of a great journal. But James Flint was not so thoughtless. He saw it all at a glance, and his friendship for Ada made him desire to help her and shield her all that lay in his power.

Yet there was another side of the case that he was not slow to see, and that his very friendship made all the more apparent to him. If he took her upon the staff of "The Mercury," he must not make life a bed of roses for her, lest the breach between her father and herself should widen instead of being healed.

He therefore looked at her in a critical, judicial sort of way, and in the same tone that he might have used to an unknown applicant, he said, quietly:

"Kindly sit down, Miss Gray. I am afraid you are becoming excited, and that is a fatal fault in a reporter. I won't tell you how foolish I think you are, because I am quite aware that it would do no good just at this time; but I believe you will discover shortly that the bed of a reporter is not a downy one by any means. There are trials and vexations in the life that you would never dream of; but I quite realise that that also is a useless picture to draw for you now. You will find that it is a very different thing to report a lecture, for example, for the amusement of your friends, from what it is to do it for the readers of a great journal. You will find that interviewing men and women, subject to insult at every turn, being at the command of a person to whom every man and woman is a machine that knows nothing of the meaning of fatigue, is not so fine when one takes it by the hand as it is when viewed from the princely security of a fashionable drawing-room. If you desire it, I will take you into my employ under a salary such as is given to novices; but I warn you now that I cannot shield you in any way from the hardships of your office. You will not be under my control. I shall rarely, if ever, see you. You will have to receive your orders in the regular way and do the duties assigned to you. The salary will be two pounds a week to begin with."

He stopped and looked hard at her. She had grown a trifle paler; but Ada Gray was no fool. She understood him even better than he thought she would, and instead of the look of shrinking fear that he had expected, she faced him bravely.

"I did not come with the desire that you should favour me more than another," she answered, coldly. "It was not my desire to solicit charity, but work! It seemed to me that I had a greater opportunity in the office of a newspaper than as typewriter and stenographer in the office of a lawyer."

"Good heavens!"

"The choice was between the two. I should earn but thirty shillings per week there. I accept your offer. If I fail to properly do the work assigned me, I shall expect to receive my discharge the same as if I were Sarah Smith or Laura Jones, instead of one of your former friends."

He perfectly understood the bitterness of her remark, but was too much her friend to correct it. He bowed a trifle stiffly.

"Will you tell me by what name you wished to be known in the office?"

"My own!" she answered, proudly.

"But is that best? People often write under a *nom de plume* you know. If there should come a time when—"

"I have no concealments to make," she cut in, hastily. "My own name will answer every purpose. There is no shame in the calling; I am undertaking. Ada Gray the reporter will be equally as respectable as Ada Gray the daughter of the millionaire."

He could not but admire her for her courage and bravery, though his opinion was still the same of the ultimate result, but his coldly polite face expressed nothing as he arose.

"If you will excuse me for a moment, I will see the city editor," he said, quietly, leaving the room before she had an opportunity to reply.

She thought it a trifle peculiar that the great man of the paper should go himself to seek the lesser; but she had not the right to question, and sat there half-dazed under the shock of what she had undergone, until the two men returned together.

She did not like the appearance of the city editor. His face had an expression that reminded her of her father, showing the effects of dissipation. He was still young—not more than five-and-thirty, apparently—and his dark, hungry-looking eyes contained an eager look as they rested upon her brilliant beauty.

He bowed when Mr. Flint had named them to each other, smiling in a manner that caused Ada to shiver with repulsion; but she tried to smile in return. He was what most women would have called a handsome man, but certainly he was not that to her.

"Mr. Flint tells me that you are to become an *attaché* of 'The Mercury,'" he said, good-naturedly. "Will you not allow me to welcome you?"

"Thank you," she replied, coldly.

"Mr. Clarke will instruct you as to what your duties will be, Miss Gray," Flint exclaimed, interrupting the civilities for business. "Is it your desire to begin work at once, or should you prefer to wait until to-morrow, or even next week?"

"There is no time like the present," she answered, concealing her shrinking from him admirably. "I am ready now."

"Then, if you will accompany Mr. Clarke to his office, he will explain the preliminaries to you. Good-morning! Let me know from time to time how you are getting on, will you?"

She bowed without replying, angry and chagrined at his manner. Was this a test of what her changed situation was to bring? she asked herself, forcing back the indignant tears.

James Flint stood for a moment regarding the door that had closed behind her, his fine eyes contracted half with pain.

"Poor little girl!" he muttered. "I always knew her Quixotism would get her into trouble. Heigh-ho! one must be cruel sometimes to be kind. I am afraid I have not much elevated myself in her estimation by this morning's work; but, good heavens! what was one to do? A half salary and a fairly easy berth would but have widened the breach between her and her father; and if I had given her nothing at all, it would have been worse. It was the only way. I must go and see her father to-night—curled old fool!"

Meanwhile, Ada had followed John Clarke to his own office, and sat before his desk, while he explained to her what the duties of her position would be. He had already had his instructions from his chief—instructions

when he did not dare disobey—but he told her in an insinuating way, and with a leering smile that made her foresee, with an awful pain at her heart, that there was trouble before her.

If he had but been cold and business-like, after the manner of James Flint, she would have been content with the promise opened to her; and she began in those first moments to appreciate the chief's coldness. She saw by contrast that anything else would have been an insult to her; and as the city editor fell in her estimation, the chief arose.

When Clarke had finished his instructions, she got up, not without the nervous energy that she had experienced on her way down town, but with a feeling of weariness of heart that would have touched James Flint could he have seen it.

"Then my first assignment is to be—?" she questioned quietly.

The city editor glanced over a paper that lay upon his desk.

"To secure an interview with Miss Geraldine Frith, the actress. She has got herself involved in a scandal with a married man. His wife is threatening to sue for divorce."

Miss Gray flushed painfully. She opened her lips to ask if there were not some other assignment that could be given to her; then remembered herself as she saw the city editor's eyes fixed upon her.

She bowed coldly.

"Please have your copy here and in shape by five o'clock this afternoon. I think you will not find this a difficult interview to secure, and that is the reason I have given it to you. Good luck to you."

She did not reply, but bowed again and left the office, her heart filled with fear.

She had realised for the first time that the genuine trials of her life had begun in earnest.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A lady, representing 'The Mercury,' is here, madame, and asks an interview."

Geraldine Frith raised her pretty head from among the sofa pillows and looked irresolutely at her maid for a moment. She had been weeping, and the fact that she was lovely in spite of it spoke volumes in her favour.

"What shall I do?" she asked, half appealingly, of the servant; "what shall I do, Budden?" Oh, I am so weary of all this terrible scandal! If I see her, she will only misrepresent what I say, and tell anything that pleases her; so long as it makes a sensation for to-morrow's issue! I think you had better send her away, Budden, don't you?"

"It will only make it worse, madame. She will still say what she likes, and will only misrepresent you all the more for the slight you give her! If you ask me, I should say, see her by all means."

Miss Frith, the actress, raised herself wearily, making a gesture of deprecation.

"I suppose you are right," she said, bitterly. "My unfortunate profession makes me a target for all newspaper maliciousness and cynicism; but I must bear it as bravely as I can. Bring her in, Budden."

She did not even go to the glass to see that her hair was properly arranged; as most women would have done when about to face a woman who would speak of her beauty, or lack of it, to all the world on the morrow, but sat there listlessly waiting, her great grey eyes fixed upon the door.

She had not long to wait, for Budden moved with the characteristic quickness of her countrywoman, and Ada was not slow in following her.

A strange sensation overcame Miss Gray

as she stood for the first time in the presence of the person whom she was to interview. If she had been sent there to ask Miss Frith's opinion of woman's suffrage she could have done it, and perhaps reported the interview with almost laughable exactitude; but to stand before this suffering woman and probe into the secrets of her heart for particulars to tell to a morbid public, who had no interest in her, but only a vulgar curiosity, was quite another thing. It was like constituting herself a judge, and saying to this woman: "Are you guilty or not guilty? and, if guilty, will you name any extenuating circumstances that you may think proper?"

Children of well-bred people are taught from infancy to avoid questions as vulgar and impertinent, and in the presence of that pretty, tear-stained woman, the reporter felt her mission to be coarse and ill-timed. It seemed to her almost as if she had come there to satisfy her own curiosity, and she found herself colouring and stammering in the presence of one of that solid profession whose members she had been taught to avoid as she would a scourged community.

"I hope you will pardon this intrusion, Miss Frith," she faltered. "I feel as if I were taking an unpardonable liberty in coming here to question you upon a subject that must be a very sore one to you, but I had no choice in the matter. I tell you frankly that I know nothing about it, at all, except that bald statement that was made to me at the office before I was sent to you. Is there anything that you wish to tell to the public? I promise that I will do you what justice lies in my power, and I ask you again in advance to forgive me."

Geraldine Frith looked at her in amazement. This was a different type of reporter from any to which she had been accustomed, and after a slight hesitation she rose and extended her hand with a peculiarly winning smile.

"I am particularly grateful to 'The Mercury' for sending a woman and a lady to me," she said, quietly. "I shall not hesitate to tell you any side of this unfortunate story. There has been so much that is not true printed in the papers about me that I feel that it would take months to set myself straight again, talking all the time! And I am afraid I never could. Oh, how little people think what they are doing, when for the sake of sensation, they attack the reputation of a woman! It is like a bridge of glass that even a shock demolishes. And her very innocence may be the cause of all! Appearances are the grossest lies under the heavens, and the person who accepts them as proof of fact is either a fool or a scoundrel. Won't you sit down?"

There was a depth of passion and bitterness in the woman's voice that sent a thrill to the very bottom of Ada's soul.

Was that true which she had said? Were appearances the grossest lies under heaven and had she misjudged those whom perhaps she had no right to judge? She trembled slightly as she took the seat which Miss Frith indicated, and found herself facing as sweet and dainty a little woman as she ever remembered to have seen. The mournfulness of the sad grey eyes touched her curiously.

"I am sure it is not true," she cried, passionately. "that which they say of you. It could not be. Whatever Frederic Vere may have done—"

"Wait," interrupted Miss Frith, a little sob marring the purity of her sweet voice; "you must say nothing against Frederic Vere. He is the kindest, noblest, staunchest friend that ever woman possessed, and though the whole world should be against me, I never could and never would say aught else. I have no other tool save myself at his expense. That his wife has chosen to miscon-

strue and misrepresent his friendship for me is a grievous misfortune, but neither his fault nor mine. There are reasons why we are both bound and gagged. We can say nothing in our own defence. We must let the whole world have the opinion of us that it will. There! I am saying more than I should. I beg of you not to report that foolish remark to the public. May I trust you?"

There was the strongest appeal expressed in Geraldine Frith's eyes, and Ada shivered slightly.

"You may trust me," she answered, in a low tone. "But tell me what I am to say?"

"Tell the world that I have no answer to make," answered the actress, proudly. "Tell them that I know my profession is against me; that appearances are against me; that I am innocent, but I don't expect people to believe me, and I don't ask it. Perhaps I should not believe another, similarly situated, and therefore I ask no quarter. I have nothing else to say to the public, but to you—I don't know why, but there is something in you that appeals to me so strongly that I have no power to resist it. I don't even know your name, but I should like to feel that you believe in me. I should like to hear you say that you do not think me the guilty wretch that the world is making of me. I swear to you that I am not guilty, and I should like to hear you say that you believe me. Will you do it?"

There was a passionate pleading in the words that Ada could not resist. She took the extended hands and pressed them closely.

"I do believe you," she said, huskily.

"Thank you," murmured Geraldine Frith, when she could control her voice. "I can't tell you how much good that has done me. I am very lonely—very miserable. There are plenty of those who come here to worship me as an actress; but there is not one to offer me the sincere friendship that my heart is craving. I wish I could tell you the truth of this wretched affair, but I cannot. But at least I may say this much to you: It is impossible for that dreadful story to be the truth—impossible. Don't you know that there are secrets which not even death should break? If I were dead to-day, Frederic Vere could not speak in my defence, except to swear that I am innocent, of wrong. Oh! people are so cruel to believe harm until they know!"

"Very cruel," returned Ada, faintly.

"But you don't believe it. You never could. I am so grateful to you for coming—so grateful for your sympathy and your trust. Won't you come again? Won't you let us be friends? I don't know why, but in spite of your rich dress, it seems to me that something in your face tells me that you are as alone as I am—that we need each other. Will you come?"

"I will come."

"And you will tell me your name?"

"It is Ada Gray."

Geraldine Frith started.

"Not the daughter of Oscar Gray?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the actress, in consternation; then suddenly remembering herself, she said more quietly: "But what are you doing here in the interests of a newspaper?"

"I, too, have had my trouble," answered Ada. "You were quite right when you said that I am alone in the world. There is no one more peculiarly alone than I."

"But your father—you see, it is my turn to become the interviewer now—where is he?"

"Married."

Miss Frith paused as if lacking the strength to pronounce the name. Her face was ghastly, and she was plainly trying to control her agitation.

"To a woman who calls herself Winifred

Trevor," answered Ada, excitedly. "I see that you know something that should be communicated to me. Will you tell me what it is?"

"You are wrong!" gasped Miss Frith, her face betraying her words—"altogether wrong. I know nothing. I—I have met your father, that is all!"

CHAPTER IX.

Once alone, Arthur Clinton sat down beside a table, and leaning his head upon his hand, tried to think.

He could scarcely realize the change that that brief half hour had brought into his life. Winifred Trevor, whom for six long years he had looked upon as dead, was alive, and as much his wife as she had been in those old days when he had believed that he loved her, and when she had caused him such bitter grief by the knowledge of her faithlessness.

Alive, and married to Ada Gray's father!

That was the complication he had to face, and what was he to do?

He confessed that he did not know, and he felt dazed and unable to think connectedly. Should he go to Oscar Gray, tell him the truth in spite of his oath to the contrary, and so force him to put Winifred away for Ada's sake?

He arose and almost staggered across the room, took up his hat, and went out into the air as the thought came to him.

He was a proud man, and had inherited his pride from both sides of his family. They were of ancient lineage, upon whose escutcheon not the faintest stain had ever rested, and to acknowledge that he had married a depraved woman wounded the very tenderest spot in all the armour of his self-respect. He loved his honour as he had never loved his life, and to confess it soiled and blotted by connection with such a woman as Winifred Trevor was more than he could endure.

Yet he loved Ada with the purest, sweetest affection that ever cleansed a man's soul. What should he do? Save her at the cost of his own name?

He knew that Oscar Gray would make his shame public, that he would spare him in no way. Could he endure that even for Ada's sake?

He could not answer his own question. He did not know what to do.

For hours he walked and thought, but neither walking nor thinking seemed to bring him nearer to the solution of his difficulty. He knew that his love life was at an end for ever; that he could hope for nothing more from Ada, and he tried to put the awful anguish out of his heart in order that he could decide what was best to be done.

But he reached no conclusion. He knew nothing more at the end of those hours than he knew at the beginning.

He returned home at last, wearied, worn out with physical fatigue and mental misery. He swallowed a glass of wine, changed his clothes, and, ordering his carriage, drove to the residence of the Grays.

Someone was singing a rollicking drinking-song in the drawing-room, and before the servant had lifted the *portière* to announce him, he recognized the voice of Winifred Trevor. It was a beautiful voice, liquid and clear as that of a bird, and he could not prevent a thrill of admiration as he listened.

Mr. Gray came forward with outstretched hand as he entered.

"This is kind, Clinton," he cried, as his wife rose from the piano. "Winifred and I were trying to amuse ourselves alone on this, the first night of our home-coming."

"And succeeding admirably well, if one may judge from appearances," answered Arthur, endeavouring to speak lightly.

"Allow me to present you to my wife. Winifred, this is an old friend of—my daughter."

She swept up to him and extended her hand, a dazzling smile curving the corners of her mouth. She was gloriously beautiful. Her white throat shone like marble above the *décolleté* corsage of her evening-gown. Her eyes gleamed like living coals, not less brilliant than the jewels that blazed upon her bosom.

Clinton had never seen her look like that before. There was something absolutely overpowering in her loveliness. It seemed to get right into a man's veins like wine and intoxicate him.

To his own surprise, he found himself touching her hand, and Mr. Gray's words were not quite distinct to him as he exclaimed:

"This must be quite a surprise to you. One does not expect a man of my age to be guilty of romance, particularly such a one as to run away to be married; but I think almost anything could be forgiven the man who has such an excuse as that, do not you?"

He waved his hand admiringly in the direction of his wife as he spoke, and Clinton found himself murmuring some words of assent.

"Mr. Clinton and I are old friends," exclaimed Winifred, turning to him in her sweetest way. "I knew him—oh, I am afraid to say how many years ago—in Italy."

Oscar Gray frowned. A dark suspicion had entered his mind—a suspicion that the evident nervousness of his guest confirmed—but he smiled even more genially as he said:

"Really? Then my introduction was thrown quite away. It was very good of you to come this evening; though, of course, you could not have known of our marriage, Clinton?"

The exclamation was put rather as an interrogation, and Arthur was compelled to answer.

"No," he stammered, feeling himself impelled to the lie by an unseen force. "I did not know. Is Miss Gray—"

He could not finish the sentence he had begun, and Gray's face darkened. There was nothing in his voice to indicate his anger, however; as he replied:

"My daughter has chosen to absent herself from the house for a little while. She is a little peculiar. She has been mistress here for some time, and we all admit that it is a trifle hard upon a girl to be forced to lay the reins in other hands. She is angry at the thought of a new mother, and has gone away until she can reconcile herself to the idea. She will return in a few days."

Clinton was about to reply, but he felt those great black eyes fixed upon him, and could not. After all, what should he say? Should he cry out to this man; "That woman is no wife of yours!"

What would Oscar Gray say to an exclamation like that?

And then he heard a sweet, purring voice in his ears, and he seemed compelled to listen against his will.

"If you are a friend of Ada, Mr. Clinton," Winifred was saying, "entreat her to come back. I have no desire to usurp her place. Tell her that I want to be her friend, nothing more. Assure her that she is more than welcome to be mistress here, and beg her to return to the home from which I feel that I have expelled her. Will you do that?"

Before he could reply, a servant entered to ask Mr. Gray's presence in the library on a matter of imperative business, and when he had gone, Winifred laid her hand upon Arthur's arm and lifted her eyes to his face. There were tears in them that increased her beauty a thousand-fold.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried, leaning toward him so that her hair almost touched his

cheek, "I have been thinking so much since my return home to-day. I am awfully serious in my efforts to do what is right. I feel that I can never forgive myself if she does not return. Won't you help me, Arthur? Won't you try to let me live an honest life? I am ready to do what you say. I don't want to do anything, say anything to anger you, dear, but how can I help it? Why should we live for the eyes of the world? Arthur, have you forgotten our old love?"

"No!" he cried, hoarsely; "I have forgotten nothing—nothing! But you are as dead to me as if you had never lived! You have chosen to make of yourself another man's wife. Now remain as you are!"

"But, oh, Arthur! I can't bear to think that I have robbed her of her home. I can't bear to think that because of me she has left the place of her birth, the home over which her mother reigned. I feel like a burglar that had stolen from her her treasures. But I want to give them back. I don't want her father's money; I swear it to you! I want only the respectability that his name would give me. I want only to be able to give up the life I have led. I want to be a good and honest woman, that is all, and she is more than welcome to all the rest. Entreat her to come back. Will you, dear?"

"She would refuse. Do you think she would endure constant association with a woman like you?"

She did not attempt to disguise the shrinking in her eyes, but let him see it all.

"Then," she said, humbly, "assure her that if she will not, I shall go away. After all, what matters it? I would not harm her, dear, for all this world, because you love her. Tell her that if she will not come, I can go—anywhere, anywhere! That all I ask of her is to receive me as her guest. I will be satisfied with even less than her friendship. Oh, Arthur!"—flinging out her arms with a passionate gesture of misery—"tell me what to do, and I will do it. I am not so bad as you think. The wrongs that I have done have been forced upon me; and, after all, the world has believed worse of me than I have deserved. I swear to you that this is true! I swear to you that I have never been anything to any man in its baser sense, but only very foolish and utterly miserable! You ought to believe me, for if I had been the woman that you have thought, I should have hounded you to the earth. I should either have forced you to accept me as your wife, or have disgraced you before all the world. I did neither; but when you showed me that you despised me, I went away and tried to remain as if I were dead to you. But it could not last, dear. My misery was too great to be borne in silence longer. But I am not utterly bad, Arthur. I will not take that girl's home from her. I utterly refuse to despoil her life of all that made it worth living, but I can do nothing of myself. You must help me. Will you do it?"

She looked at him earnestly, beseechingly. For the first time in his life some belief in her entered his heart. He was scarcely willing to acknowledge it even to himself; but she saw it, and a thrill of exultation shot through her soul. He was silent for a moment; then he said, hoarsely:

"I will see. Give me a little time. Wait."

CHAPTER X.

Geraldine Frith and Ada Gray stood looking at each other in stony silence for a few moments that seemed almost like hours to the young reporter; then she bowed very slightly to the actress, and took up a card-case which she had laid upon the table.

"I cannot force your confidence," she said, coldly, "After all, any circumstances that there might be in the case could be of little moment to me at the present time. There is nothing else that you can tell me, I suppose?"

"Nothing," murmured Miss Frith, faintly.

"Then, good-afternoon."

"Wait! I have your promise, have I not, that you will say nothing of any little indiscretion of which I may have been guilty during our interview?" she asked, almost desperately.

"You have."

"Thank you a thousand times. And—and you will come again—or let me come to see you?"

She asked it tremulously, pleadingly, and Ada hesitated. She scarcely knew what to say.

"I am changing my address," she answered, at last, "and can therefore give you none at present. I may write you later."

She bowed again, but Geraldine Frith was beside her before she could quit the room.

"I feel that I have offended you," she exclaimed, taking Ada's hand between both her own, "and I could not bear that. I want your friendship more now than ever before. I want you to promise me that if you should need me for anything—anything—you will call upon me. I have money in plenty, and I should feel that you had conferred a favour upon me by allowing me to do anything that I could for you. I don't want you to think that I am insulting you, but a day may come, which you cannot foresee, when you may need me. Will you promise to call upon me then?"

There was something in her tone, even more than the words, that touched Ada strangely. She did not reply, but bent her stately head and kissed the actress upon the forehead. It was apparently a promise that Miss Frith accepted as more sacred than words.

(To be continued.)

TWO WOMEN.

—30—

CHAPTER XXV.

Hester found her mind haunted by fears about Leonore. Her friend's silence had prepared the way for these fears, and when Mr. Chetwynde had brought her the story of Lady Maxwell's reported grave illness, and her journey to Paris for treatment of this same illness, the girl's heart was filled with sudden pain, and with a longing to go to the aid of the poor creature who loved her so truly, who had been sacrificed so wantonly to the vulgar ambition of a dead man, and put into the merciless and unscrupulous power of a living and infamous one. She wrote a letter full of the tenderest, warmest affection. If Hester could have obeyed the wish most prominent with her now, she would have started at once for Paris instead of writing, but it was not possible to do this for several reasons. Miss Graham was not so well, she caught a slight cold on the very day that Hester had taken that walk in the park, having for her escort, first Mr. Crossley, and afterwards Lord Thurso. Hester had, therefore, a return of some anxiety on behalf of the gentle old governess, who depended so much on her young companion for comfort and pleasure in her darkened life. Then Allie was also far from well, and apart from both these reasons was the unconquerable horror Hester had of coming in direct contact with Sir Charles Maxwell. Moreover, what could she do were she to go to Paris? She had nothing but imagination to feed and sustain

her fears for Leonore's safety, and, after all, she might find on arriving that she had been mistaken, not only in these fears, but in the view she held of her friend's health. Illness was possible to Leonore as much as to others, and though Sir Charles Maxwell's wife had never made complaint to her of any sort or description, that could not be put down as a certainty that no cause for complaint existed. Indeed, it was far more likely that in such a question Leonore would keep silent even from one whom she cared for as she cared for Hester.

All she could do, therefore, was to wait as patiently as was possible till either some communication reached her from Leonore, or Mr. Chetwynde should bring her news of her friend.

She kept her dark foreboding fears to herself, and tried most honestly and sincerely to push them from her; but although Hester was far from being an hysterical or weakly superstitious woman, she possessed a highly strung nervous organisation, a remarkably sensitive imagination, and the experience she had had of Charles Maxwell not unnaturally excited this imagination to its fullest power.

The only person she could have discussed the matter with was Miss Graham, but she was careful to say as little as possible to the sick woman, for Leonore's late governess and guardian was easily agitated, and all excitement was bad for her. One thing, however, Hester did discover, and that was that the possibility of Leonore's illness being genuine was more or less assured, for Miss Graham, in speaking of her pupil, once distinctly hinted at some malady which she feared might have descended to Leonore from her mother, who had succumbed to the fatal strength of the disease.

This fact was a relief, and, paradoxically, an anxiety. It did away with the horrible suggestion of foul play that had forced itself so determinedly into Hester's mind, but it roused the natural uneasiness at the thought of the suffering that might await the good faithful girl, now and in the future.

The days passed. No news came from either Leonore or Mr. Chetwynde, although when no answer had arrived to her letter, Hester had written and reminded the latter of his promise to make inquiries for her.

One afternoon, however, when Allie had arrived as usual to drink tea in Hester's cosy drawing-room, a telegram was brought in which, on tearing open, Hester found came from Mr. Chetwynde. It announced briefly that he had returned from Paris, and would pay her a visit that same evening. This was the first intimation she had received of the lawyer's movements touching Leonore.

A sudden chill presentiment seized Hester as she read those words; it was a feeling she could neither explain nor shake off. She heard Allie speaking in a misty sort of way, she could hardly have said what words the girl uttered; her whole mind was set on the question of Leonore. Was everything well with her? Had Mr. Chetwynde good or bad news to bring? Why had he not written? She roused herself with an effort as Allie rose to leave.

"I must go; there is another dinner to-night," Lady Alice said, putting on her sealskin coat.

"I thought your brother was away," Hester said, not requiring much effort to be full of interest where Thurso was concerned. She had not seen him since that morning in the park, but she had not been surprised at this, for Allie had told her he had gone up to Scotland on business.

"Dick will not be home till the day after to-morrow," Lady Alice said; she spoke slowly—hesitatingly—in a way that at once conveyed to Hester something was wrong.

"I am sorry we have so much entertaining," the girl went on after a little pause. "I—I think it seems a little lacking in respect to our mother's memory, and—and—" and then Allie stopped.

"I am sure Lord Thurso will agree with your gentle wisdom in this," Hester said. It was so difficult to her to know exactly what to say.

"Unfortunately, Dick has very little power of agreeing or disagreeing in the present case," Lady Alice said, and her usually gentle voice had quite a bitter ring in it, "for he has not been consulted in the matter."

Hester frowned.

"Have you said nothing to Violet," she asked, hurriedly smoothing the fur of Allie's coat with her hand as she asked this.

"I do not speak to Violet, except when I am actually obliged," Lady Alice said. There was a moment's silence between them and then the girl went on more quickly: "If it were not really for Dick's sake I should abstain from being at these dinners altogether, but I feel that as long as I am present things have a better appearance than they otherwise would have, and so—" Lady Alice paused. "There is no doubt, Hester," she said, when she spoke again, "that Violet is drifting in with a very bad set. Fashionable people, of course, and people who are well known, but not the set that we have been used to, and certainly not that to which Thurso's wife should belong. She is very young and inexperienced I know, but I am afraid Violet is more than obstinate, and sometimes, Hester, I am terribly nervous about the future. It seems to me now that Dick can never know real happiness in his married life."

The two girls stood silent with their hands clasped. The weight, the shadow in Hester's heart, was shifted now from the thought of Leonore to the sweeter, dearer thought of him whom she loved.

"If only Violet were like anyone else; if only she would accept a little guidance, a little counsel. Hester, I have been wondering—do you think her mother would have any weight with her. I am very sure, if she is at all dear to her mother, her present line of conduct could not fail to give her grief and pain."

Hester shook her head slowly.

"I do not think Violet would tolerate any interference from her mother. I am sorry for that poor woman, Allie. You know I have had no cause to think too kindly of her, but with her many, her great faults, she had good in her. She adored Violet—she worshipped her—she believed in her. I am not far wrong I am sure, when I say I think Helen Campbell imagined her child to be a very angel of goodness, of purity, of sweetness. One cannot help pitying her now, when one realises how terrible, how bitter must be her punishment in this respect. Violet was not happy, once she became your brother's wife, till she had sent her mother absolutely out of her life. She has not a single memory for all the sacrifices, all the devotion that mother heaped upon her all through her life. Oh, Allie! I am sorry for that poor, lonely, outcast woman, and I am sorry for others beside her." Hester added, sadly to herself.

"Well, then, it is no use thinking of Mrs. Campbell, she cannot help us."

Lady Alice drew on her gloves slowly.

"Next week Emma will be in town"—she spoke of her eldest sister—"I am dreadfully afraid there will be warfare between her and Violet," a faint smile broke on the girl's lips, "Emma is the very antithesis of everything that Violet is; she is strict almost to puritanism—more like poor mamma. I fully expect," Lady Alice said, with a little sigh,

"that she will object to my remaining with Dick and his wife. Oh! Hester, why cannot we two live together; how happy we should be, just we two selves and no one else."

"That sounds extremely selfish," said a voice at the doorway, and Mr. Crossley emerged out of the gloaming into the firelight. It was his first visit to Hester since her refusal of his offer, and she coloured slightly at seeing him, as also did Lady Alice. Mr. Crossley, on the contrary, was quite easy and unabashed.

"Give me a dish of tea, darlint," he said to Hester, with all his old sauciness, "and then I will walk this young lady home."

"The brougham is waiting for me," Lady Alice said, trying to smooth the pleasure she felt at sight of him out of her voice and face.

"We will dispense with it," was Billy's grand suggestion. "Hester, my mother is furious with you—you know!"

"Your mother is an angel, and angels are never furious."

"She says you have never been near her for a century."

"And where have you been, pray?" inquired Lady Alice, growing courageous.

"I have had a week's run with the Marden Vale hounds. Awful good sport! I nearly broke my neck once, Allie. By Jove! it was a crumple up and no mistake!"

Lady Alice's delicate face blanched in the firelight.

"Oh, Billy!" she said, and there was the sound of real anguish in the exclamation.

Hester ruffled his hair as she handed him some muffins.

"You are a good-for-nothing boy," she said, severely, "and you will come to a bad end."

"Well, better to break my neck than my heart, eh?" queried Mr. Crossley.

Hester accepted all the information he desired to convey in that sentence.

"Good Heavens! as if little boys had hearts to break!" she cried, continuing the present light, laughing conversation on purpose so that Allie might grow into her usual sweet, easy, self again.

"Little boys! I like that! Allie, do you hear this individual?"

"I am just going to say good-bye to Miss Graham," Lady Alice answered; "drink up your tea quickly, like a good Billy, I shall be back directly."

When they were alone, Mr. Crossley put out his hand to his hostess.

"Hester, have you forgiven me?"

"Have I anything to forgive, Billy?"

"Yes! I was a fool and I worried you. Now confess I did—a little."

Hester answered with a nod of her head.

"I will forgive you on one condition, Billy," she said, after a little pause.

"And that is—?" queried Mr. Crossley.

"And that is that you will not be a fool any more, with me or with any other person, and that you will take care of your heart, so that it may be a gift worth offering to the one person who will treasure it most when the time comes."

Billy Crossley sprang to his feet.

"I won't pretend to misunderstand you, Hester," he said, and there was a tone in his voice she had never heard there before, "but—but—" he paused, and then went on, hurriedly, "but I don't believe you are right. How can she care for me. I—I have been such a beast; I—"

"Suppose you ask her herself," Hester answered, in a low whisper, and then Lady Alice made her re-appearance, and the conference was at an end.

The two young people took their departure in a few moments, and Hester stood by the fireside, smiling with unconscious pleasure in the thoughts of the prospective happiness that lay ahead now for her dear little Allie.

She had from the first guessed something

of the secret that had grown in Lady Alice's gentle heart so long ago now, and the slight pain she felt when she listened to and dismissed Billy's most unexpected proposal had not been unconnected with the remembrance of Alice.

"Now it is all over. He will always be a boy, but he is a kind, good boy, and he will make her happy. I am sure of it. Dear, dear Allie, your pathway at last looks smooth and shining."

And then Hester's smiles gave place to shadows as back into her mind came the sad anxious memory of Leonore. The sweet, yet so troubled, one of Thurso, and the presentiment of the difficulties, maybe disasters, that lay in the roadway of life for both these two, brought back all her gravity. For herself, for her own individual share, Hester seldom had a thought. She was not as other girls are, she had been reared in a different school, she was made of a different nature, to most young women of her own age. Selfishness was unknown to Hester; she had always lived for others; for her father when she had been a child, later on for George Campbell, now again father still for Leonore, for her old, sick companion, for Alice Carme, for Thurso. So that sorrow might be averted from those she loved and cherished Hester would be content and grateful, never stopping to bemoan her own desolate, empty life, nor the sorrow of loving as she loved, without hope or chance of happiness.

Girlish dreams of vanity or romance never framed themselves in her mind; she had all her old illusions and imaginations, and those vague ambitions which had alone made life bearable to her during those miserable years she had spent under her step-mother's care; but of late Hester's intellectual roivings had ceased trying to soar so high. Duties of a more prosaic nature had lain right close to her hand, and like the true, noble heart she was, she abandoned striving after the unattainable, and took up the work, humble and unrewarded, that was sent into her life.

If she could have had a mind utterly at rest on the score of her poor, faithful, girl friend, if she could have seen a chance of peace and real happiness shining ahead for her most beloved love, Hester would have called herself almost a happy woman at this time, nor would she have asked for more in her life than that which she now possessed.

Perhaps, had the whole truth been revealed to her, had she but guessed the secret that had come all unconsciously into Thurso's thoughts of late, if she could have known the power, the spell, her grand pure soul was spreading over the suffering, blighted, disappointed heart of the man she loved so intensely, then Hester might have felt less content, have experienced those strong, natural yearnings which are part of our humanity, have let her love become more real, more tangible, less a dream; but as yet Hester knew nothing.

She loved, and was happy in the unconscious delight that this love brought her. She neither questioned nor analysed her feelings, and protected from all hurt or harm now and she did nothing but pray and hope that he who was so dear to her might be guarded in the future.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Violet was in a state of excitement bordering on agitation when Lady Alice reached her brother's house after walking through the winter dusk with Billy Crossley.

Her bedroom door was open as Lady Alice was passing upstairs, and Lady Thurso, catching sight of the girl, called to her to enter.

"Come and see my frock!" she said, as Lady Alice obeyed, too much surprised by

this unexpected cordiality on her sister-in-law's part to do otherwise.

The young women had been together alone for quite ten days, since Lord Thurso went up to Scotland, and this was almost the first time that Violet had addressed herself to Lady Alice, certainly that she had put herself out of the way to notice the girl's presence, or even existence.

Lady Alice conquered her astonishment as well as she could and looked at the mass of shimmering satin, costly lace, and heavy jet trimming, stretched out before her.

"It is very beautiful," she said, in her gentle, gracious way, "and you will look beautiful in it, I am sure, Violet," she added.

She made herself as sympathetic as she possibly could, though there was not one single thread of ordinary, natural sympathy between this vivid, splendidly handsome young creature and herself; still, Alice Carme was never one to fail in anything that could please or do good.

"It is a pity Dick is not here to see it," she continued, as the dress was held up by the maid and turned round for her approval and admiration, "he would be certain to admire it."

Lady Thurso frowned for an instant, but only for an instant, she seemed to be under the influence of some strange excitement, something that was occupying all her thoughts.

"Have you heard the news," she said, abruptly to Alice as the dress inspection over, the girl was going to leave the room again.

"No, is it something pleasant?" Lady Alice asked; her heart thrilled a little in a strange way as she spoke, she scarcely knew why, nor why her brows should contract suddenly as Lady Thurso gave a short and rather peculiar laugh.

"Well, I suppose it ought not really to be called so, although—" Violet paused for a moment. "Lady Maxwell is dead," she said, curtly, after that pause; "died the day before yesterday in Paris."

"Dead!" Alice looked as she felt, quite shocked; not that she had had any knowledge of poor Leonore, but because she knew how dear Sir Charles Maxwell's wife had grown to Hester, and what a terrible blow this would be to her friend. "Dead!" Are you sure, Violet? oh, how dreadful!"

"Dreadful for her, of course," Lady Thurso said, with indifference, a sort of manner that implied more than her words said or her lips uttered.

"And for her husband, too, I should hope," Lady Alice replied, in grave tones.

Violet shrugged her shoulders.

"*Quant à ça!*" she said, cynically, "my dear Allie, don't look so shocked; you cannot have imagined, surely, that such a man as Sir Charles Maxwell could have any other feeling but absolute disgust for such a monster as his wife was!"

Lady Alice winced and turned pale; the coarse, hard words spoken of one who lay dead, of one who had never done or thought a wrong thing in her life, had not, Hester borne testimony to this, were absolutely horrible to the girl's delicacy and refinement; she had a sense of utter disgust for Violet at this moment.

"Sir Charles Maxwell must indeed be less worthy of any honourable person's regard than I have already heard, if he could be so base as you suggest, Violet," she said, coldly, hurriedly.

Violet laughed.

"You need not lose your temper, Allie; the matter does not concern you, does it?"

"Why did you speak of it to me then?" Lady Alice asked, still coldly. "Although I had no acquaintance with poor Lady Maxwell, and desire to know nothing of her husband, I am still human and to hear you speak as

you have just done, of one who can never defend herself again, is more than terrible to me, Violet!"

"Bah! my dear, your are too sensitive. If I were discussing a friend of yours, then you might have some reason to be annoyed, but as it is!" she shrugged her shoulders again.

"And as Lady Maxwell is now dead and out of the world," she added, "it cannot matter to her in the least what is said of her, besides, I only spoke the truth—she was a monster, a great lump of ugly flesh!"

"We will discuss this subject no more, if you please," Lady Alice said, quietly, and turning she walked away without another word, her face grown pale and set, and most miserable.

"That it should be Dick's wife who spoke like this!—Dick's wife!"

Violet watched her go with another of those short pitiless laughs. She snapped her fingers after the girl's vanishing figure.

"That for you, and that and that!" she said scornfully, and then she shut the door with a bang, and walked to and fro swiftly the length of the room, her arms crossed over her breast. Her mind was absent for the moment. Her thoughts were a sort of mad excitement of wild hope of wilder schemes.

Charles Maxwell freed Charles Maxwell rich! The whole world for Violet lay in those two sentences. She was not like a sane being in this moment. The bonds of her strong lawless passion were broken asunder. If she had known exactly where to have found this man who held her in such supreme power, she was actually mad enough to have forgotten all else but her savage delight in his freedom, her wild unreasoning desire to share that freedom with him. Charles Maxwell, however, had taken the precaution to ward off this evil. He was quite prepared now for any foolish, any reckless action Violet's party; he had thought her up to fever heat, he must play her carefully. She was useful to him now to a certain point; so that she would be worse than a nuisance, she would be a positive danger. Since his absence in Paris he had had more than a dozen letters from Lady Thurso, all in the same wild, infuriated, reckless tone. He had answered her sternly, supporting with her, and manoeuvring her most delicately, and this afternoon a telegram had come from him, briefly announcing his wife's death two days before, and his immediate departure from Paris, and his promise to let her share news of him as soon as possible.

With that Violet had to be content; but the fact of his freedom was something that upset her mental equilibrium altogether. Clever schemer as he was, Charles Maxwell had miscalculated, or rather he had misunderstood, the substance of this woman's strange nature. He had classed her as an ordinary coquette, and judging by the treachery of the treatment she had meted out to him two years before, he was not so very wrong in having done so; but Violet was not an ordinary individual; her training, the blood that ran in her veins, the evil that burned in her heart, set aside, by side with her remarkable shrewdness and clever brain, made her a difficult nature to comprehend, a dangerous one to have dealings with, or at least such dealings as he had been indulging in.

She was revealing herself to him as a mass of contradictions; he had summed her up as a worldly, grasping, ambitious, hard-headed woman, and while she was undoubtedly this, she was something more: a woman of strong will, mad passion, reckless abandonment where that passion was concerned. His attitude, when they had met again after two years' silence and separation, had at one touch set fire to the flame of this subtle, all-powerful

current. He had roused her vanity, he had defied her power, by his indifference and forgetfulness. Had he come into her life that which she had conjured, a man full of bitter hatred, and desiring nothing but revenge, she might have feared him, but Violet would never have succumbed to him.

She had reached her ambitious goal, she was a wife, a woman of title and position, she had luxury, if not superb magnificence. The very instant Charles Maxwell lounged into view, treating her with as much nonchalance as though she were the dirt beneath his feet, and caring too little about her to demand a revenge, then he became to Violet the one, the only thing she desired on earth to complete her triumph.

This had been the first stage, a condition of things that had been pushed on beyond all bounds by the fierce jealousy that had followed, by the bitter hatred and anger against Hester, doubly strong when once it became clear that Maxwell had more than a passing fancy for the girl Violet held in such utter abhorrence.

Now the matter had come to such a pitch that Violet was no longer mistress of herself where thought of this man was concerned. She had suffered miserably in his marriage, although she had never troubled herself to feel anything but contempt for the poor creature whom he had made his wife. The thought of his freedom was something upon which she had never calculated, and now that it had come abruptly, Violet was bouleversée for the moment. She forgot everything but this. She put aside from her common sense, honour, duty, principles, were so many dead letters to her unscrupulous and violent mind, ambition, vanity, all; she remembered nothing but that the man who was the only creature who had power to touch her, was free to be hers, and to devote his life and his wealth to her service.

She was in a fever of unrest, excitement, impatience. Until they met again it was not possible even to forecast the events of the future, but on one point Violet was decided: that future would eventually be linked together for them, though this might take time and patience to bring about. The possibility of a very different view of the circumstances presenting itself to Charles Maxwell did not enter into her calculations. It was strange that Violet's cunning, subtle mind should not have suggested to her the thought that this present line of action was but a form of revenge, not only on her for her past treatment of him, but on another and that other Hester, Francis, for her undisguised hatred of him.

Suspicion was prone to ripen quickly in Violet's brain as a rule, but it did not even form itself now. She knew she had cared for Hester, but she had, by her careful skill of late, been lulled into believing the fancy was over. Had Violet but guessed that she and her reckless passion were the tools with which Maxwell savagely intended and hoped to give punishment to the woman who had spurned him, yet whom she loved as he had never thought to love in his life, it would have been difficult to imagine what Thurso's wife would have done; but this truth was hidden from her for the time.

She dressed in the same excited state. The next day Thurso was to return. There had been again a talk about her leaving town and going to Sedgebrook immediately after the drawing-room, at which Violet was to be present. The mourning of Lady Thurso precluded all possibility of their entering into the full tide of the season's gaieties. Indeed, the dinners which had taken place so frequently at his house had been greatly against Lord Thurso's inclination. He had allowed them, because at first he had had sympathy for his young wife's natural disappointment

at being debarred from entering the world as quickly as she had desired.

Then, after the night, when carried away by her rage and her jealousy, Violet had shown her true character, her real self to her husband, he had offered no real protest to anything she did, simply because (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22) (23) (24) (25) (26) (27) (28) (29) (30) (31) (32) (33) (34) (35) (36) (37) (38) (39) (40) (41) (42) (43) (44) (45) (46) (47) (48) (49) (50) (51) (52) (53) (54) (55) (56) (57) (58) (59) (60) (61) (62) (63) (64) (65) (66) (67) (68) (69) (70) (71) (72) (73) (74) (75) (76) (77) (78) (79) (80) (81) (82) (83) (84) (85) (86) (87) (88) (89) (90) (91) (92) (93) (94) (95) (96) (97) (98) (99) (100) (101) (102) (103) (104) (105) (106) (107) (108) (109) (110) (111) (112) (113) (114) (115) (116) (117) (118) (119) (120) (121) (122) (123) (124) (125) (126) (127) (128) (129) (130) (131) (132) (133) (134) (135) (136) (137) (138) (139) (140) (141) (142) (143) (144) (145) (146) (147) (148) (149) (150) 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VIOLET WALKED TO AND FRO SWIFTLY—HER ARMS CROSSED OVER HER BREST!

Hester had objected with all her honourable soul to the marriage her poor friend had made.

"She thinks Maxwell a scoundrel," the young man said to himself. "I have read the thought in her eyes, and, by Jove! she is not far wrong. He has always had a black name. I don't think he has done much to redeem it by his marriage. He ought to be content, I suppose, for he has got all the tin now and will not be troubled with that poor girl. I wonder what she died of—it reads rather mysterious."

Hester was at home when he arrived. It was dusk, and she was sitting without lamps, in a big chair drawn up before the fire.

As Lord Thurso was announced, she started. "Ah! I am glad to see you—glad!" she said, almost involuntarily, and, indeed, she was glad. Her thoughts the last twenty-four hours had been such horribly sad ones, so dark, so enveloped with doubt and painful suggestions. Thurso's frank, clean, honest presence was like a breath of pure fresh air where all was mouldy and suffocating.

"And I am glad to see you," he answered, clasping her hand most tightly. "I have only this instant arrived, I drove straight here from the station. I wanted to let you know by my own lips, how deeply I sympathise with you, Hester?"

"Ah!" her pale lips were compressed; without realising it she clung to his big strong hand. "It has hurt me, Dick—it has hurt me! My poor Leonore, she loved me—she trusted in me—and she must have needed me so much!"

The tension of her distressed nerves, that had been strained to their utmost limit since the news that was so terrible to hear had been given her, broke suddenly. She turned from him with a passionate gesture, and flinging herself in the chair, buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

Thurso stood by suffering almost as much at sight of her distress as she did in the abandonment of her grief—her crushing doubts and fears. His strong hands hung by his side. They quivered in every fibre. They burned to go out to that beautiful, slender form, to hold it close pressed to his arms, to minister comfort—to give strength and tender care.

Like the thrust of a red-hot sword into an aching wound, ran the sudden realisation, the true knowledge of his heart's love, into Thurso's mind at this moment. There was no longer any doubt, no longer any uncertainty, no longer any vagueness. The impulse that had moved him to try and put Hester out of his thoughts, the miserable depth of regret that would come as he recalled the bond that held him irrevocably bound to one, who by her own lips had revealed herself so absolutely unworthy, almost detestable.

The sudden tender impulse that urged him to go direct to Hester and offer her his sympathy and consolation in her sorrow, there was nothing strange or hidden from him in all this now—he knew—he understood—he suffered. He stood on the brink of a terrible struggle, an almost insuperable danger. What would be the outcome? What lay in the future? What line must he adopt to keep his heart and soul in their old honour—to subdue his natural longing, set temptation for ever on one side, and turn to the path that was his duty, his proper life?

He was no sophist; hardly a philosopher. He was only a true, clean-minded, honest, loving man. He could not play the hypocrite, even with himself. He could never again approach Hester with the word friendship on his lips. He was no longer her friend. He was more, far, far more, than any friend could ever be.

What then was his duty? Thurso hesitated only one moment. With his heart cold and heavy within his breast, with his eyes blinded, his limbs not steady, he looked his farewell on the woman he loved. Never again must he stand so close to the sweet maddening charm of her presence. Never again of his own free will, listen to the low music of her voice. Never again respond to the tender clinging of her soft small fingers.

Duty, honour, right, called him loudly away. Duty, honour, right, must be obeyed, for her sake as much as his own.

Though her tears were as bitter to him as though they bled from her heart; though her beauty, her sweetness, was greater to him now in her abandonment than they had even been in her pride, he did not hesitate.

When Hester lifted her head and brushed away the last burning tear she found herself alone. She called to him once in a low, trembling voice, and then she was silent—for she understood.

(To be continued.)

SOME curious figures might be given on the subject of the remunerativeness—and the unremunerativeness—of literature. Though still proverbially uncertain, the rewards of authorship have of late shown a gratifying tendency to increase. General Grant's "Memoirs," for instance, have brought his family nearly £100,000 in royalties. The largest sum paid for a single novel is said to have been £40,000 to Alphonse Daudet for "Sappho," published in 1884. £16,000 was received by Victor Hugo for "Les Misérables," which was published in ten languages. Lord Beaconsfield obtained £12,000 each for "Endymion" and "Lothair," George Eliot received £8,000 for "Middlemarch," and Charles Dickens £7,500 for "Edwin Drood."



MRS. WILLIAMS WENT TO A PANEL, AND PRESSING WHAT LOOKED LIKE THE LEAF OF A TREE, DISCLOSED A DARK PASSAGE!

DWARF DICK.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

In the luxurious first-class carriage of the train speeding through the night air from Cologne there is only one occupant, a gentleman, with the unmistakable air of an English "mildred" with every sign of wealth about him, seen in the rich fur rug lying on the opposite seat, the various initialled travelling bags and addenda lying about, the thousand and one subtle ways which wealth and birth have of evidencing themselves. Books and papers are strewn around him, showing no lack of means for whiling away the tediousness of the journey, but at the present moment they are unread, and the owner, half-reclining in the corner, his rich sable coat clasped loosely round him, whiffs slowly away at his cigar, and seems to find his thoughts more pleasant occupation.

Seen under the light of the lamp, the face strikes one as being remarkably handsome; the eyes are dark and tender, eyes which have done damage to a good many female hearts, and many have sighed in vain and given up the siege in despair, for Cecil Trevanion is by no means a ladies' man, and has been considered hopeless by many a match-making Belgravian mamma, though they might change their minds could they but know the groove in which his thoughts are running as he removes his cigar from his mouth and looks contemplatively, if somewhat absently, at the blankness and darkness of the window opposite, where even the ghostly face of the porter, peering in as he

goes along the train, makes no impression, and a smile, such as many a Belgravian damsel would have given worlds to have had bestowed on herself, curves the strong-determined-looking mouth under the drooping moustache, and one sees that it is truly a face handsome as that of the Greek Antinous or the Apollo Belvedere.

A pair of woman's—may girl's eyes are haunting him, a pair of liquid, tender, dreamy eyes, yet eyes withal that can light and sparkle, and show every mood and change of thought of the soul within; eyes such as he had often dreamed of in his dreams, yet never before seen, and the few moments he had seen them on the platform had been enough to impress them indelibly on his mind. And the face to which they belonged—a lovely, childish, innocent face, with a delicate, peach-bloom complexion, dainty little rosebud mouth, every feature perfect, and the graceful, well-poised head—crowned with masses of rich golden-brown hair.

"What lovely eyes they were," he ruminated, with another slow whiff, "they make one think of the saying of the dwellers in the Emerald Isle, 'blue eyes put in with a smutty finger,' and yet the expression, the soul, the life in them, more than in those of all the girls I know put together. Wonder who she is, and who the old gentleman was with her, he looked old enough to be her grandfather, they were not rich, evidently—did they get in the train, or not? By Jove! the girl's face interests me more than I ever thought a woman's face could do—if ever I marry, that will be the face I will seek. I wonder, though, people talk about Fate in these things—is this mine?"

The smile still curved his lips, then an intent startled look came into his face, as the sound of a sharp cry of terror—a woman's cry—

the sound of weeping and a heavy thud in the next compartment smote his ears. He started up, showing himself to be a splendid, muscular young giant, and listened intently. Yes, there were more frightened cries, or it seemed so to him. Still the sounds of agonised weeping.

Then he swiftly crossed to the little door opposite, when he felt sure which side it was, opened it, and found himself in the next compartment—a second-class one. There were the two occupants, a young girl—good Heavens! it was the one he had been dreaming about—and an old man, half-reclining on the seat, in a state of insensibility; such was the impression on his mind as he hastened forward and tried not to startle the young girl, who seem too frightened to be astonished at anything.

"Father—father—wake up and speak to me—to Nora!" she wailed, putting her arms round the insensible figure—pillowing the white head on her breast, calling upon him, doing all she could to restore consciousness.

"Oh! sir—can you help him—he is not dead? See, help me—for Heaven's sake!" and the lovely eyes bathed in tears looked up at him, so that he would have gone through fire and water to have helped her.

"He is not dead," he assured her, for he felt the feeble beating of the heart; then the old man's eyes slowly opened and stared vacantly upward, and his hands moved about restlessly.

"Nora," he murmured, after a pause. "Nothing for them—gone—gone!"

His words were scarcely distinguishable, and he seemed to be murmuring to himself, then the voice became gradually stronger—"Ifsley!—Ifsley Royal!"

Cecil Trevanion started at the last words, and looked intently at the face before him,

and exclaimed: "Do you know Hsley Royal? Why that is!"

But the voice went on unheeding; "Years ago—I saw it—then—Dwarf Dick, so long ago—it's so—so—"

Again the voice sank to an unlistenableable murmur. The vacant, unseeing look increased, the head and body fell back as with a scarcely audible sigh the spring of life snapped for ever.

The young girl's grief was terrible to witness as she slowly realised that what had lately been living and breathing was no more. But her paroxysm soon wore her out, and she became stonily calm, and allowed Cecil to carry her like a child into the next compartment, where he laid her down on the seat with a soft cushion under her head, and then wrapped her tenderly in his fur rug. All the while a curious thrill passed through his whole being, as he held the slight figure in his arms, and felt a sudden wild desire to kiss the sweet face lying so near his own, to keep her like this, his own for ever!

Silence again, only broken by the rattling, scuttling engine in the distance; grossness, coarse, it was. A corpse, for which she had done all that he was able, in the next compartment, a motionless, rigid figure lying opposite, with a pale beautiful face, still as though it had been carved in marble; then the brightness melted, there were some convulsive sobs, she suddenly rose, and before he could stop her she had passed swiftly through to where the dead body of her father was lying, and had thrown herself upon the rigid form, and was covering it with kisses and bitter tears.

"Father, come back—don't leave us all alone!" he heard, then the train slackened, and he told her gently they were nearing Brussels.

"Brussels," she repeated. "And mother will be there to meet us. And, oh! what shall I do?"

"You will let me help you, as far as I can," he whispered.

Then the train puffed into the busy station. He hastily gathered his things together, to assist the poor, grief-stricken girl, who, with eyes full of tears, waved to the gentle-faced lady she called to as "Mother," and got no farther, and to Cecil fell the task of breaking the sad news.

A groom was waiting—he came up to Cecil with a telegram in his hand.

"This has just come, sir, I see it is from 'Hsley Royal.'"

Cecil tore it open, he bit his lips.

"My uncle is worse, Murray. I must go at once, do all you can for those two ladies, pay any expense, and follow by the next mail."

It cost him somewhat to speak thus calmly; his feelings were conflicting, both to leave this young girl, whose image was already impressed on his heart, and yet another life was flickering out, and he must go.

There was only time for a few words, low whispered words of sympathy and hope, they might meet again. The beautiful eyes looked up at him with a look he carried in his heart, and he wondered whether Fate would be kind and let them meet again, some day.

CHAPTER II.

Three years have passed away since the sad meeting in the train. Three years which have brought much suffering to Nora Claverton, and have stamped their impress on the lovely face. There is no longer the innocent, childish look in the blue eyes, which attracted Cecil, but one of nobly-endured sorrow; it is a woman's soul which looks out of them, not that of a frightened child.

The remembrance of Cecil Trevanion has faded into dimness, but not into oblivion; he still remains the personification of an ideal hero, a Sir Galahad, and she wonders, sometimes—very rarely indeed—whether they will ever meet again, and whether he will have retained any recollection of her, though she immediately scorns the idea, it would be impossible, she thinks. The thought comes to her suddenly—now show utterly preposterous it is, as she looks round the room, which, though it was neat and clean, yet was no more than a small and suitably-furnished back-room, showing everywhere tokens of poverty; not the poverty which will beg, but the proud poverty which will suffer and die rather than let the world know how bitter its suffering is, which will keep the dark side of the shield hidden, and only let the polished surface be seen, and, like the Spartan boy, will put on a smiling face while the hidden teeth are gnawing away his life.

Into Nora Claverton's eyes came a few tears as she thinks of all this; how can they ever meet but as strangers, when a gift—the hard, and bitter gift of poverty—lies between them?

The present is dark, and the future looks still darker. Turn which way she will, there is no light, not a gleam to brighten the dreary way.

"I tell you, Nora, I won't have you preaching at me, and always springing after me; you'd better hold your tongue, and just mind your own business!"

And the speaker, William Claverton, brought his hand down with some force on the table and glared at his sister as she stood opposite him, looking very pale and weary in the feeble light of the small lamp on the table between them. He had been drinking again she saw, though it was only enough to make him very difficult to deal with, when his passions were easily roused, and the other-wise, weak-minded, easily led youth, would not mind what he said or did.

She had said nothing, but her white, tired and reproachful face angered and incensed him. She had ventured once or twice to remonstrate gently with him on the late hours and questionable company he kept, that is, when he was able to reason rationally.

"I've stood it long enough," he went on, with an oath, "and by—I won't stand it any longer, always preaching and looking at me with that sanctimonious face, as if I hadn't a right to do as I like; do you think I can always be tied to your apron strings?" he asked, fiercely. "Do you think I'm a baby to be looked after by you, to go just where you think right, to come back when you think the proper time; I chose to, come home when I like, and go where I like after office hours, and I won't have you interfering any longer—you'd better find a situation somewhere, where you'll be able to exercise all your preaching powers, and look as sanctimonious as you like. I've got plenty of places I can go to—"

"Oh! William, but mother wished us to be together," broke in Nora, her face white even to the lips, and a look of horror in her eyes. It had been terribly hard not to answer him; hot words had risen to her lips, but she had fought them back, and this was wrong from her in the bitterness of her grief.

He was slipping into evil ways she knew, and all she could do and had done would not keep him back from the downward course.

"She did not mean you to be a drag on me," he answered, a little less fiercely; after a sullen pause; "I've made my arrangements, and after to-night you will not have the pleasure of giving me a sermon if I come home a little later than

usual. You had better look out for a situation with some nice old widower," he half sneered, "he may like a few of your lectures and a long face; I've had enough of it!"

Nora seemed half-stunned by his words and manner, and could only look at him with sad, reproachful eyes, which seemed to incense him more than anything, for he burst out with:

"It's no use looking at me like that, I know what you mean, though you don't say anything. I'll choose my own company, without any of your interference!" and he looked at her so threateningly that she drew back.

"I have said nothing, Will," Nora returned, looking at him steadily, "about those you associate with, though I feel sure they are only making use of you for their own ends."

"By—" he burst out with a word which made her shudder, "you shall say nothing more, or—" here he stopped, and his arm fell to his side—it had been raised as though to strike her, only perhaps a sudden gleam of feeling prevented him.

"Understand this, Nora, we can't stay any longer together; I want freedom; you go your way and I'll go mine."

She saw by the fierce look in his face that it would be dangerous to say anything more; she crept further back into the shadow of the bed, and then sinking herself down on it, tried to calm mind and body, too exhausted to do more than lean as she had done herself at first, listening to her brother's unsteady movements as he stumbled about the next room making his preparations for leaving, she fancied; for the separation her mother had not wished, and she wondered vaguely if she were looking down on her weak, erring boy, the tool of unscrupulous men, who were dazzling him with their promises of future wealth, blinding him to all sense of right and wrong. Before many hours were over she knew that he had kept his word, and that she would have to find a home for herself among strangers, that he had left her to fight for herself, alone!

CHAPTER III.

"Well, Miss Claverton, I am sorry the others did not suit that you went to yesterday, but you see it is somewhat difficult to get companions are always rather hard to procure."

And the lady principal of the registry office looked at Nora a moment, and then went on opening her letters.

"Oh, here is perhaps the very thing!" and she paused, after reading one written on very thick note paper, with a large crest and monogram on both envelope and paper.

"I should think this would just suit," and she read slowly: "Lady Hsley wants a young lady as companion; and to make herself useful, as she is advanced in years, and does not enjoy very good health." She particularly wished to find someone who will be patient in sickness, grief, and affliction; who will be willing to act as her amanuensis; play and sing to her; read to her. She must be able to read well and clearly without being monotonous. The position will be very quiet, and Lady Hsley very seldom comes to town, but spends the greater part of the year at her country seat; the lady chosen may reckon on being comfortable and treated with every consideration. The salary will be first £50, £50 to £60 a year, and all found, and will be considerably increased should everything be found satisfactory. I should think that would just suit," said the principal, again, looking at Nora, whose face had flushed as she heard the salary offered, but she thought she could never hope for it; it would be too good for her to expect. "Your age

is about right, and, unless you are afraid it may prove very dull, though we can't all have just what we like," added Mrs. Wilson, sententiously; "I should think you had better go at once; Lady Ifsley is staying in town for a few days, and will see anyone this morning. Would you like the address to try?" she asked, in a very business-like way.

"Oh, yes!" answered Nora, quickly; "I hope I may suit, I should like it very much."

"I hope so, too," said Mrs. Wilson, disregarding the latter part of the speech, and thinking of her fee; "Here it is, then: Lady Ifsley, 500, Portland Place."

Nora's heart beat, and her face flushed as she hurried along, with the precious address in her hand. How she hoped she might suit; the salary would enable her to save for the future, she thought. "But they will only find some objection," she said to herself, with sudden terror, as she stood on the steps before the wide doorway at Portland Place. "I can never get into such a grand house as this," and she half thought of going away, but the bell had rung, the great, wide door was being opened by a tall and very imposing footman, with powdered hair, and with a great many silver buttons on his smart livery.

"Her ladyship will see you now," said this elegant individual, coming back, after a few moments, into the tessellated hall where he had left Nora, and leading her through a draped doorway into the large inner hall, lighted from a great glass dome in the roof, and then up the wide, softly-carpeted stairs, into a gallery running round the great hall, and in which marble statuary gleamed from out of masses of glossy palms, and costly heavy draperies hid the doorways, and *pourri*, in great Oriental china vases filled the air with a faint, odorous perfume.

"What name shall I say?" asked the footman, looking down somewhat superciliously at the slight and not very elegantly dressed girl standing so timidly before him, as he paused before the heavy drapery half hiding the gilt doorway.

"Nora Claverton," she answered, quietly. "Miss Nora Claverton," he announced, opening the door with a slight flourish, and retiring noiselessly to the servants' hall, where he announced that he had just let in someone, he supposed was after the post of "her ladyship's toady," but she was jolly good-looking, and no mistake.

Nora saw before her a vast room, so softly carpeted that no footfall was heard, the walls lined with great mirrors, and a few priceless paintings; the long windows, draped with rich lace, and heavy crimson brocade curtains; a multitude of little tables and stands, of huhl, or else richly carved and inlaid with pearl, and emerald, lapis-lazuli, and ivory; exquisite marble statuettes gleamed on polished marble pillars; gilding and luxury was everywhere; and for a moment she was too confused to see anyone, till a little old lady, in a rich dress of black silk, and with some rare old lace on her head, rose from a chair before a little writing-table and beckoned to her to come forward.

"You have been sent by Mrs. Wilson?" she asked, in a sharp and somewhat imperious voice, looking at Nora a little critically, "You have lost no time about it."

"She gave me your address first, and so I came," replied Nora, in as steady a voice as she could.

"You know exactly, then, what I require?" said Lady Ifsley, a little less sharply, "but pray take a seat; you look a little tired," as she motioned Nora to a chair in front of her; "I hope your health is good?" she asked, as they sat down, "because I don't want anyone to be always ailing, otherwise we should be two invalids together. My own health, is, of course, not to be depended on; at my age it can hardly be expected, but at yours—"

looking more kindly, at the fair, tired, young face before her—"it ought to be all right."

"Mine is naturally very good," Nora assured her eagerly, her face flushing under the steady scrutiny of the elder lady, "I have only had a little more anxiety lately, in seeking a situation; that is always anxious work."

"Oh! that is it, is it?" said Lady Ifsley; and then she proceeded to question Nora as to her capacity, her age, and her experience; and here there was some hesitation, as Lady Ifsley did not want anyone without some experience, but her voice was much kinder than it had been at first, and Nora wondered whether she might hope for success. Then she had to undergo a long catechism, and a test of reading aloud, and various other things, to prove her fitness, or otherwise, for the post.

"You are rather young," said Lady Ifsley, with another kind look at her, as she finished, "but I think we could get on together. However, as I expect there will be someone else to see, I will let you know the day after to-morrow. The references you have given seem quite satisfactory; two of my great-nieces were at school at Mile. Leblanc's, so I know her name quite well. Good-day, Miss Claverton," as Lady Ifsley touched the bell for the smart footman to open the door and let her out into the noisy street. Nora felt somewhat happier and lighter of heart as she came out; the interview had not been unsatisfactory, and she threaded her way more gaily along the labyrinth of crowded thoroughfares, until she came out by the Marble Arch; then she gladly turned into one of the shady avenues and sat down to rest herself for a little, for she was very tired and footsore, and wanted a little rest, both mentally and physically.

She tried to prevent herself dwelling too much on the hopes of Lady Ifsley's letter being favourable, it was hardly to be expected that she would engage her, she told herself a dozen times over; but the tension of anxiety, all the same, was very great the day when she was to expect the answer, and she listened eagerly for the postman's knock. But the first post went by, and her heart sank with a feeling of disappointment; it would be nothing after all; then at last she heard the great rattle of the well-known knock resounding through the house, and feeling herself unable to go down and see, lest she should be disappointed, she waited, with her heart thumping painfully, in her suppressed anxiety, till a knock came to her door, and the landlady's daughter handed her in a letter.

There was the crest on it she saw at once, but it seemed a very thin letter indeed, and she opened it with a feeling that she was to be disappointed.

"500, Portland Place."

Lady Ifsley is glad to say she will engage Miss Claverton for her companion, and will be obliged if she will call to-morrow between 11 and 12 a.m. to make final arrangements, as Lady Ifsley purposes to leave town next week, and would be glad for Miss Claverton to accompany her, if possible."

It almost took Nora's breath away. Next week! She had very little time to prepare anything, and she wanted so much; as she quickly thought of her rather scanty and somewhat shabby wardrobe, and she had hardly any money to pay what was to be paid. Mrs. Wilson would want her fee at once, she knew, and there was some rent owing, and her pride forbade her entertaining the thought of asking for part of her salary in advance.

William she thought, with some fear and trembling, perhaps he might have a pound or two he could lend her, when he knew there was a certainty of being paid back at a fixed time. She wrote a little note to him

at his office, telling him of her good fortune and asking him if he could lend her a little, to go on with.

"Very glad to hear you have been so lucky," came back the answer, "but can't let you have a stiver; I want money myself; have been devilish unlucky lately, so when you have any to spare I hope you'll let me share a little. I'm really in a beastly fix; myself, about cash, and if I don't get some soon I shall have to pawn some of my clothes; my watch is safely at my uncle's. I'm very sorry I can't help you, but there's the fact, I can't; however, I hope you'll manage somehow."

Nora's eyes filled with tears at the selfish heartlessness of the letter, and she felt a vague terror as she read the words.

"What had he been so unlucky about? Why should he lose money like that? Oh! mother," she sobbed; "I am not keeping my promise I know, but how can I help it? I could not do otherwise. I did all I could, but he broke away himself. I could not keep him back, though I did try hard."

She did get the money she wanted, though it was at the sacrifice of her father's gold watch and chain and one or two trinkets, relics of better days, which she had to pawn at a distant shop, where she thought nobody could ever know her. She crept there and back, as though she had committed a crime, for poverty, in spite of the proverb, has a curious knack of making one feel that one has committed a crime against the sacred person of Society.

CHAPTER IV.

The elegant barouche drawn by the pair of greys, with the footman and coachman in powder and smart liveries, drove up the stately avenue, and round the wide sweeping drive in front of the turreted mass of stone buildings of Ifsley Royal.

The June sunshine was lighting up the picturesque old front with its deep mullioned windows, bringing out a thousand rich tints in the old grey stone and the mantling masses of ivy which beaded one side and shining brilliantly on the beautifully kept flower beds. The rich clusters of scarlet and white geraniums like a vision of the tropics; the bushes of wonderful creamy roses, and roses of all colours, exhaling the sweetest of all perfumes; they were everywhere, climbing in rich luxuriance over the terrace and the little arching verandah on the south side, while the grey stone made a lovely background for the creamy and pale pink blossoms. In the distance spread out the richly wooded, widely undulating park, with the glistening waters of a little lake shimmering far away, and a few deer were seen wandering about their own sweet will under the wide spreading trees. A lovely scene it was, and Nora looked at it with eyes which took in all its beauty; could it be that she, who had lately been driving in shabby lodgings in a very fourth-rate part of London, should be suddenly transported to this lovely place?

She followed Lady Ifsley up the broad, stone steps, under the great porch with the arms of the Ifsleys sculptured in the stone above, and into the great hall, where the big, carved oak fire-place was guarded by figures in polished steel armour of dead and gone Ifsleys, armour that had seen good service in the days of the civil wars, while devices of pikes, swords, pistols, sabres, and cuirasses decorated the oak-panelled walls, and shone like burnished silver against the rich crimson draperies, and steel-bladed figures were in niches up the great, polished oak staircase, where the light came in a golden and red glory through the stained-glass window, where again the Ifsley escutcheon was emblazoned.

Nora looked at it all with wondering eyes, it was all so rich, so beautiful, so splendid in its grand stateliness, this old home of a race that had lived here ever since the Plantagenets, that it seemed impossible that she, a beggar maid as she was, should be suddenly brought amongst so much luxury, that this was to be her home for some time to come; even though she was but a dependent, still it all seemed a dream, and she half expected it would all vanish, and she would wake up and find herself in her dismal back room, but the sound of Lady Ifsley's voice roused her, she was saying, kindly:

"I hope, Miss Claverton, you will be able to make yourself happy here; Mrs. Williams will show you to your room. I am going to mine to prepare myself for tea, which will be ready very soon; we take it in the summer drawing-room, which is open to the garden. I love flowers and fresh breezes so, and am always glad to get away from stuffy London, to breathe the fresh sweet country air. I hope it will do you good, and bring some roses to your face," she ended, with a kind little smile that went to Nora's heart. She had not had much kindness and sympathy lately, and she replied gratefully, feeling that now it was not a dream:

"Thank you, very much, Lady Ifsley; I am sure I shall be very happy here, it is all so very beautiful, and I love flowers and fresh air so much more than a smoky town, that it will not be my fault if my stay here will not be a very happy and useful one."

Her fault, no, it would not be; the fault of others, and she, the innocent one, would suffer, but that was mercifully hidden from her; it all looked fair and bright now, the clouds seemed to be rolling away, except that hanging over her brother, and perhaps that would roll away in time, too, she thought, as she followed Mrs. Williams, a stately-looking old lady, whose hair had grown white in the service of the Ifsleys, who knew their history by heart, and whose life was bound up with theirs. Along wide corridors, full of pictures and costly articles from all parts of the world, they went until they turned into a little square oak-panelled vestibule, and throwing open the door of a large, cheerful room with a pretty white bed, and furniture covered in dainty chintz—

"This is your room, Miss Claverton," said Mrs. Williams, "I hope you will like it and that there is everything in it that you want."

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Nora, drawing a long breath of content, and giving Mrs. Williams a grateful smile, which won the latter's heart. "It is a charming room, and what a lovely view!" going quickly over to the window, which looked out over the beautiful home park, with a long range of blue hills in the far distance.

"Yes, it is a beautiful place," assented Mrs. Williams, with a proud, pleased smile, "the house, too, is as fine as any, if not one of the finest in the land, with so much historical interest attaching to it."

"Indeed?" said Nora, looking away from the window, "I can easily believe it, for it seems as if those old, grey walls must have witnessed a good deal, in times gone by. I should like to see all over the house, one day."

"I shall be very pleased to show you, whenever you like," replied Mrs. Williams, "but now I must go to my lady, as tea will be ready very soon. If you want anything you will please let me know, will you not, Miss Claverton?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Williams," replied Nora, taking off her little black hat and her well-worn jacket; "but I think I have everything here I want—and more than I have been used to for a long time," she added to herself, as Mrs. Williams quietly left the room.

"And this to be my home," she went on, looking round the pretty and luxurious room, with a grateful look in her face. "For how long, I wonder? I hope it will be for a long time. I have been knocked about so much lately, that I feel as if I wanted to find a resting-place somewhere. Oh! William! I hope it will be nothing to do with you that shall make me leave it." The vague feeling of terror, lest he should do some disgraceful act, again crossed her mind. How was it he lost money, as he said he did? His earnings were not much she knew, but they were quite enough to keep him comfortably, without getting into debt; and yet he never had money, at least, that she knew of; and then those times she had seen him worse for drink, times that she looked back upon with shame and horror, when she remembered how he had disgraced himself, and how he had abused her, and sometimes worse than that.

"I did my best," she said to herself; "I did not reproach him; I tried to do all I could, but he would not have it. He went away himself, I could not keep him back."

Just then the boom of the gong was heard for tea, and she hurriedly bathed her eyes and brushed her hair, then hurried out and found Mrs. Williams outside, waiting to pilot her down to the summer drawing-room, where on a little low table, the dainty silver service was laid, and Lady Ifsley was waiting.

"We are very quiet here," said the latter, handing Nora a fragile cup of eggshell china full of fragrant tea; "at least, now, it is very quiet; we are free to enjoy the beautiful flowers and the woods in all their summer beauty, before everybody has left town and there is a rush for fresh air. Do take some of that cake, it is especially good. Later on I expect we may have some visitors. Gentlemen like the shooting, though they find the hostess somewhat dull," and she looked at Nora with a smile, "but I have my nephew and heir down with me then, and he is very popular."

"I should think they would like to come here with you," said Nora, frankly and naively, for she had taken a great liking to Lady Ifsley, with her little sharp ways and speeches; "and especially to this beautiful old house."

"Yes, it is a fine old place," said Lady Ifsley, with what seemed to Nora like a little sigh. "Let me give you some more tea, you must be thirsty after the journey; we dine at half-past seven—rather an old-fashioned time, but I am somewhat an old-fashioned person you will find."

Nora took her tea and thanked Lady Ifsley, then sipped it, while she looked out dreamily over the fair scene upon which the window opened, the masses of rich bloom, the gorgeous passion flowers on the terrace, and a brilliant peacock strutting about, resplendent in the sunshine, and her heart swelled in thankfulness to the Providence which had been so far kind to her.

CHAPTER V.

Days passed away; days full of occupation, though it was pleasant and not laborious. Nora was getting used to her work, into which she had resolved to throw herself heart and soul and to give perfect satisfaction to her kind mistress, who on her side seemed to have taken a very great fancy to her gentle, pretty companion, and was always desirous of giving her some little surprise or pleasure, long drives in the elegant open-carriage to some lovely spot in the heart of some wood for little *al fresco* picnics with some youthful neighbours. So she forgot to ask Mrs. Williams to show her over the house, till one

day, when the sky was dull and grey and the rain was pouring down outside relentlessly and all thoughts of getting out had to be abandoned, she bethought herself of this, and sought out Mrs. Williams, in her comfortable housekeeper's room, and found her only too pleased to expatiate on the glories of the house she had served so long, and to take up her great bunch of keys, and display its riches and beauties.

"This is the picture gallery," she said, opening the richly-carved oaken doors, disclosing a long gallery lined with portraits on both sides, and lighted from the top, "Here you will find portraits of all the chief members of the family from the time of poor, unfortunate Henry VI. downwards."

Nora saw portraits of men in armour, in the padded and magnificent costumes of Bluff King Hal, and resplendent in the satin and embroidered cloaks and huge ruffs of his arbitrary, dress-loving daughter, Elizabeth; men in long-curved wigs and pointed beards of the time of Charles I. and his careless, graceless son, in the service of whom many nobles lives were given, for the Ifsleys had been staunch royalists, and had fought bravely, and shed their blood freely for the Stuart kings, neither of whom had been worth so much devotion.

"Ah, my dear," said Mrs. Williams, pausing before a portrait of a noble young face, "those were stormy times for Ifsley Royal; many's the one who was hidden and succoured here then, for this place is full of secret places and passages, leading from the inside to the outside; and many a poor, hunted royalist has escaped while the soldiers were searching for him inside the house, and they say one lived here a whole month, unsuspected and undiscovered, and the soldiers in the house, watching and searching the whole time."

"Are those secret places still to be seen?" asked Nora, with a face full of interest, "I should so like to see them; and what an interesting place this must be!"

"It is that," affirmed Mrs. Williams, "I'll show you all the places we know of; some of them are stopped up, I believe, but I think you'll find them curious and interesting."

"I shall, indeed," replied Nora, "I have often wished to see such places, I have read about them in history and books, but that is not the same as seeing them."

"No, indeed it isn't," said Mrs. Williams. "Do you notice," she asked, looking round, "how very lovely all the Ifsley ladies were? They were famed for their beauty;" and she pointed proudly to them as she passed by.

"Yes, they are very beautiful," said Nora, thoughtfully, as she looked at those fair, patrician ladies, clothed in satin, and glittering with jewels. No care and anxiety for the morrow marked those smooth brows.

Just then her eyes caught sight of a portrait in the lace frills and stock of the beginning of the century, and she stopped as if she had been struck, and then walked forward to look at it more closely; it seemed as though she had seen it before. Where could it have been? Yes, she remembered she had seen a miniature like that among some her father had prized very highly, and when she had asked curiously who it was, he had said he would tell her all about him by-and-bye, when she was able to understand all about it; and there was a lady's portrait, too, there, and he had said the story of the one would be that of the other, and she would know one day; he had died so suddenly, and so she had never heard; but she looked about as if expecting to find the other portrait she remembered; and yes, there it was, hidden away in as dark a corner as it was possible to find.

"Who is that gentleman?" asked Nora, when she had recovered from her surprise at the coincidence.

"That," said Mrs. Williams, "is the father of the late Lord Ifsley." There was a little constraint in her voice and manner, it seemed as though she wished to pass on to something else, but Nora still stood there, curious to find out something more about these two portraits.

"It is very strange," she said, thoughtfully, "but I have seen a miniature of both of them before, in my father's possession, and what is still stranger is that there is a great likeness between that gentleman and my own father."

"How very odd," remarked Mrs. Williams, still with that little constraint in her voice, "a strange coincidence!" Then, after a short pause, "There is rather a romantic story connected with the marriage of that old Lord Ifsley. Her ladyship does not like it spoken about, though I really do not know that it matters, and I never tell it to people who come here to look over the house; still, if you will not repeat it in the presence of her ladyship, I will tell you, if you like."

"It shall go no further," replied Nora, gravely, "and I should like to hear, very much."

"Well," said Mrs. Williams, "that Lord Ifsley was somewhat wild and eccentric, and fell in love with a girl in the village of Stanton, close to here. She was the daughter of the village grocer, and his lordship and the girl one day disappeared, and after a little while he returned, but she stayed away, and there was some talk of a marriage, though most said he had betrayed her, when he succeeded to the title. Well, after a few years they both came back, and there was a public wedding, but a little son had been born to them, which did not look well, and, of course, everybody doubted what she said as to a first marriage, and said that the elder boy was illegitimate. Anyhow, they lived very happily together for some years, and other children were born to them; but Lady Ifsley stoutly maintained that there had been two marriages, though at the last she died quite suddenly one night when no one was with her. Well, when she died, as no proof of the first marriage could be found, the first son was of course unable to inherit title or estates, and the second, the son by the second marriage, as she called it, refused the estate during his brother's lifetime, on the ground that by doing so he was casting a slur on his mother's name, and the property was inherited by the third son, who said he did not mind what people said; if his brothers could not, well, he might as well have the property as let it go to rack and ruin. It caused dissensions and harsh words between the brothers, and they both left the place, the elder one going out of the country altogether, and no one ever heard what became of him; the second son died childless and unwedded after some years; and the third son was left free, but he and her ladyship were sore disappointed when all their children died, the last two years ago, and left them no one to succeed. Her ladyship is only here till his lordship, the heir to the estate, who belongs to quite another branch, marries and settles here."

"What a very strange story," said Nora, looking up thoughtfully at the picture, "and is there a portrait of the second son here, the one who refused the estate?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Williams, who was not ill-pleased at being able to tell the story to an attentive listener, "yes, there is one, though only a small one, just there to the left."

"How very strange," again remarked Nora, "but I have seen that face before, or one like it, among some miniatures of my father's."

Mrs. Williams had moved on, remarking that it was getting a little dark, and they had better go on, or else they would not be

able to see the secret places and some of the tapestry in the state rooms."

As she did not wait, Nora had no choice but to follow, though it was in a very bewildered and dreamy state. How was it there should be this likeness? And how came it that her father had miniatures of these three people? How could it be? Perhaps her father had met this elder son somehow in his travels; he was much older than her mother had been, she knew, but it was very strange. She followed Mrs. Williams along the polished oak floors of the galleries, with their carved and painted ceilings; and then on to the splendid staircase, where there was a portrait of Queen Elizabeth, who had once stayed at Ifsley Royal. Kings, queens, princes, and princesses, had all been here; the place was famous throughout the land for the regal hospitality that had been dispensed there in those days.

"Of late years there has been little of that," sighed Mrs. Williams, showing Nora into a magnificent room, hung with some of the choicest specimens of Gobelin tapestry, and magnificent paintings on the ceiling, from the brushes of a world-famed artist, while splendid stools and chairs and lounges, now shrouded in holland, were disposed about the vast apartment.

"This is the audience chamber, placed at the disposal of any of the royal guests who stay here, and nearly every one of the sovereigns of England have trodden these floors," she ended up, with mournful pride, and leading the way along into a suite of splendid rooms, till Nora was quite bewildered at the vastness and splendour around her, and felt that she certainly had no part in it, she was out of place altogether.

"These are her ladyship's private rooms," said Mrs. Williams, at last, coming to a splendid suite of rooms, "they are in the oldest wing of the house, where several of the secret chambers have been discovered. These rooms have always been the rooms of the wife of the owner, since Lady Dorothy kept her husband concealed from Cromwell's soldiers for several weeks in the secret passage opening behind this tapestry," and she went to a panel, and pressing what looked like the leaf of a tree, the whole panel flew open and disclosed a dark passage. "This leads into one or two places, but finally out into the garden, under the south window of the library; this is generally known as the tapestry room," ended Mrs. Williams, walking forward and showing the rest of the suite; then the gong boomed out and they had to separate for five o'clock tea, and, as Nora found a great many visitors down there, she forgot all about the portraits up in the picture gallery and the story Mrs. Williams had told her.

CHAPTER VI.

"We must expect to be very much more noisy now, Nora, my dear," said Lady Ifsley, looking across the breakfast-table, with its beautiful silver Kettle hissing away furiously above the dainty china service in front of Lady Ifsley. "My nephew, Cecil—at least, I call him my nephew, though he is not really so nearly related as that, but he is heir to this property, you know—he is coming next week, as the preserves are in good order, and will bring several friends with him, so I must make up a party to meet them, and I count on you, Nora, my dear, to help me entertain them."

"I shall be very pleased to do anything I can, Lady Ifsley," replied Nora, with a flush of pleasure on her face at the kind words and look which accompanied them, "but I am afraid I cannot do much as far as entertaining

goes—there will be others who can do that better."

"H'm," said Lady Ifsley, dryly, "not if the men have eyes, my dear; anyhow, you must look your very best. I hope you have some pretty dresses to set you off."

"Well, I have one," replied Nora, thinking of her one black grenadine, a dress she had felt to be extravagant, but a necessity. "I think it will look pretty, though I don't suppose, Lady Ifsley, that anyone will notice me."

"Well, we shall see," was the reply, as her ladyship went on opening her letters.

Nora was in a flutter of excitement the next few days; she hardly knew why—they would not notice her, she said to herself, a poor, insignificant, little paid companion, as she was, but she could not help feeling glad there was to be some excitement and life in the big house at last. It had been very quiet for the last few months, and though she could not expect to take part in any gaieties or think any one would notice her, she might look on quietly from her corner and enjoy it all.

"And that is a good deal to be thankful for," she said to herself, musingly, as she went up the broad staircase to her room, after tea, to read and rest before preparing for dinner the day that the guests were to arrive.

As she opened the door she caught sight of a large card-board box, placed conspicuously on the floor.

"It must be a mistake," she said to herself, "I don't expect anything like that."

But, no, on it was plainly written, "Miss Nora Claverton." She opened it eagerly, and took out of its tissue paper wrappings an exquisite evening dress of soft cream silk and lace and flots of ribbons; a dress so perfectly elegant in its purity and simplicity that she cried out in admiration and delight.

"It can't be for me," she said to herself, as she looked at its sheeny, soft folds. "Who could have sent me that lovely present?"

Just then a knock came at the door, and Lady Ifsley's maid entered with a little note in her hand for Miss Claverton, and said that her mistress wished her to do anything for her that she would like.

"Thank you, I think I can manage very nicely," replied Nora, breaking the seal of the note and reading: "Please accept the little souvenir in the box, I hope you will like it. The greatest pleasure and the warmest thanks you can give me will be by wearing it to-night."

Nora hastily wrote a few lines of thanks to her kind benefactress, and then she hastily tried the dress on with a very childish delight. She had never had anything so pretty, or that fitted half so well. She looked at herself in the long glass, and flushed as she caught sight of the lovely picture reflected.

"I wonder if he—Mr. Trevanion—would recognise me in this dress?" she said, shyly to herself. "I was so wretched and miserable, that I don't suppose he would, now that I am to be decked out in all this finery. Shall I ever see him again, I wonder?" with a sigh, as she proceeded with her dressing and to pile up the glistening masses of bronze-brown hair on the top of her shapely head, and to rearrange herself in all her finery, as she called it. When she had fastened the lovely spray of pink roses and maiden-hair fern which had been brought her, she gave herself a last look as the second bell clanged out. And surely no portrait of Gainsborough or Reynolds was half so lovely as the picture it gave her back, with the delicate rose-leaf flush on her fair cheeks, and the dark blue liquid eyes, flashing with pleasure and excitement, the soft, rounded, white arms and

shoulders, while the masses and folds of her dress only served to beautify, and the pink rose nestling among it, and matching her cheek.

She went slowly down the wide oak staircase, where all the clusters of lamps were lighted, shining on the burnished armour and pikes and sabres which decorated it, and then went on and into the great drawing-room, a huge, splendid room, with rich soft carpets, and gleaming crystal and glass, and furniture of white and gold, which was only used when visitors were there.

There was no one there, she thought, and she turned into a little recess to take up a book, when she saw that a gentleman was before her. He was tall and fair but had his face bent over a book. As she hastily retreated he raised it, and dropped the book as he caught sight of the lovely vision; then he came forward with a glad exclamation, holding out his hand eagerly, while she was too surprised to move, for there before her was Mr. Cecil Trevanion, and he had remembered her all this time, she could see by the glad look in the handsome face.

"How are you?" he exclaimed, taking the hand she had no power to hold back. "Fate has been kind after all. I said I hoped we should meet again, or have you forgotten all about me?" with a little disappointment in his voice, as she did not answer, and he looked at her and thought what a very lovely picture she made, and how much she had improved since that day—though, even then, she had seemed the perfection of all that was fair in woman.

"No, I have not forgotten your kindness to me, Mr. Trevanion," Nora replied, a little tremor in her clear voice; at the suddenness of this meeting, and before she could say more there was the *frou-frou* of a trailing silken dress, and in swept Lady Isley, in rich black silk, with a magnificent parure of flashing, almost priceless diamonds.

"Well, aunt, and here I have turned up you see, just in time to put in an appearance for dinner," as he greeted Lady Isley, affectionately, while Nora stood transfixed as she heard his words. This was then the nephew Cecil, Lord Isley, the heir to all these vast estates, and he it was who had befriended her in her great grief.

"And so you have already made friends with my dear Nora Claverton?" said Lady Isley, turning kindly to poor frightened Nora. "I hope you will remain so."

"I hope so too," replied his lordship, with a good deal of emphasis, with a look at Nora's downcast face, though there was no chance to say anything more, as the guests swept into the brilliantly-lighted room with a great *fledement* of satin and silks, and flashings of diamonds and precious stones. Just as they did so the gong clangd out, and everybody paired off on the way to the dining-room.

Nora found herself allotted to a very handsome officer, with a somewhat vacant stare, and an eye-glass. They were almost opposite to Lord Isley and a very handsome blonde, with a somewhat cold and statuesque kind of face which rather repelled Nora, and she wondered whether whether he cared for her. He paid her a good deal of attention and they had much to say to each other, though once or twice Nora thought she was asking about her, as she looked at her and gave her a cold, supercilious glance that Nora thought rather humiliating, and she turned slowly to answer a somewhat inane remark of Captain Lee's, a remark accompanied with many "ers," which irritated Nora, and she did not venture any more. She preferred watching them all; the lightly beautiful flowers, the gleaming silver, the crystal which reflected a thousand prismatic tints, and the

dazzling jewels flashing in the hair and on the breasts of the ladies, made up a scene which almost bewildered her, and her mind went back rapidly to those old days in the dismal lodgings, when they sometimes scarcely had enough to eat, when every penny had to be considered, and she very often had had to go out and do the very modest marketing for the small household herself, and now here she was, dressed up in silks and lace, and taking part among the highest in the land.

The days followed one another as in a dream. The gentlemen went out shooting, and then there were the dinner parties in the evening, when Lady Isley determined to uphold the honour of the place; they were really feasts to be remembered, and Nora learnt the extent of the wealth of the house. Those were golden days to her, spent in the presence of the hero she had so long worshipped. She could find no flaw in him; on closer acquaintance his character seemed to grow in nobility; he was so universally liked, rich and poor loved him, and then she gradually woke up to the fact that she too liked him "more than passing well," that her heart was fast going out of her own keeping. And he? Well, she did not dare to think. He was always seeking her society, always thoughtful for her, ever stopping to speak to her when they met, the first to notice whether she looked ill or well. When he spoke to her his voice took a tender inflection that it had not when he spoke to the other young lady guests, who were far more beautiful than she was herself she thought; could it be that he, who was so far above her, cared for her a little? Her face flushed hotly, as she said it to herself, but she thought he did; this King Cophetua of hers.

"Ah! Miss Claverton, here I have you at last," and Lord Isley caught Nora's hand and looked down at her with a look in his dark eyes that thrilled her, and completely crushed the desire she had to make an attempt to escape, and rendered her powerless in his hands.

"Why is it you always avoid me?" went on the pleading, yet masterful voice, "have I offended you in any way, or have I done anything that has displeased you?"

"Oh, no, how could you?" said Nora, finding her voice, though it was a low and tremulous one; "I do not think I have avoided you more than I ought to do."

"More than you ought! Why ought?" he queried.

"Well," she replied, very shyly, "your position and mine are so different. You are the master, and I am the dependant; though you are all very kind to me; and again, you have so many guests, I—I could not expect you even to remember me amongst so many."

"Miss Claverton—Nora—you will hurt me very much by saying anything as to our positions. There is no difference that I can recognise," he went on, earnestly; "As to yourself, I am not flattering when I say that you are fitted by nature for the proudest position a woman can occupy. As to remembering you, I cannot help doing so. If I only dared hope you would do the same for me!"

His voice was very low and tender, and a look came into his eyes before which her own sank, and there was silence between them, a silence more eloquent than words. Then the drawing-room door opened wider—they were early, and the second bell had only just gone—and a gentleman entered. Nora looked up, to meet the half-cynical glance of a face she at once mistrusted, as she looked at him all the colour died out of her cheeks and lips, and all the joy, the delights fled from her heart. He came like a bird of ill-omen across her path, and she felt a sudden,

unaccountable presentiment of evil; but he advanced towards her, a polished saddle upon his face, and Cecil introduced him as Curtis Vane, with some coldness in his voice, while a sudden constraint fell upon them after the necessary phrases had been made; it was a very great relief when the others came in, and the gong went for dinner.

Nora went in, still with the same cold, icy feeling at her breast, a sudden chill, like the breath of a coming storm; and she looked at the splendid scene before her as though she were looking at a far-away picture, and heard what was said to her as in a dream, and answered quite mechanically, till her partner gave her up in despair.

Mr. Curtis Vane was very polite at first, and somewhat distant to Nora; then after a day, or so his manner changed slightly towards her; it lost the deferential, polished tone somewhat. He was always seeking her society, and trying to make himself agreeable to her, and did not look always very pleased, when she answered him so coldly.

"You are always avoiding me, Miss Claverton," he said, one evening when he found her alone in the Yew walk, "Such a shy beauty, chary of showing her charms! Do you not know that I would do anything to please you, to gain one grateful look from those lovely eyes, one word of thanks from those sweet red lips?"

"Mr. Vane, you would get what you wish by leaving me alone," was the quick retort; "I dislike such speeches as those you have just made."

"Upon my word, Miss Claverton, you are scarcely polite," was the answer, "I suppose you do not make that same answer to all who speak to you, Lord Isley, for instance, when he makes pretty speeches to you; which you believe, I suppose?" he queried, with a slight sneer.

"Mr. Vane, how dare you," flashed from Nora, "Lord Isley is a gentleman," she went on, with cutting emphasis, and looking at him haughtily.

"And I am not," was the slow and somewhat sneering query, "You are still more polite, Miss Claverton."

"You force it from me," she replied, haughtily, "a gentleman would not speak to a defenceless girl as you have spoken to me. This is not the first time, Mr. Vane; I may have to earn my own living, but my name is as honourable as yours, and will always remain so," she added proudly, trying to pass him.

"Will it?" He caught her hand suddenly, and forced her to face him. "Do you think I am quite ignorant of your history? I know your brother." Nora became suddenly cold as ice, and she turned her horrified gaze on him. "Never mind how I became acquainted with him; he is not an acquaintance to be proud of; he has been mixed up with some very nasty transactions on the turf,"—he did not add that he himself had not come out unscathed. "He will soon make, or probably already has made, an acquaintance with the inside of Her Majesty's prisons; he is looked for most affectionately and carefully, I can assure you, on a charge which is made up of various accusations; embezzlement, forgery; and one with a very ugly name. He shot one of his 'pals.' I suppose he would call it, in a drunken brawl; so, Miss Claverton, your boasting as to your honourable name was somewhat premature."

Nora looked at him in silent, speechless agony, but he went on with a cruel delight, as he saw the tortured look in her eyes. She would not yield to the vile, half-veiled proposals of a life of shame he had ventured to make her—proposals which her innocence had prevented her understanding, in their full significance.

"You would not like them to know all this

here, I suppose?" went on the sneering, cynical voice, "Lord Ifsley might not think so highly of you if he knew you were closely related to a gaol-bird—quite a new incident in the family archives. We have all heard of King Cophetua; the charming story believed in by sentimental school-girls; but though we know very little of the personal history of that very delightful maiden, we have no reason for believing there was anything 'shady' with the beggar-maid's family. I am afraid his lordship's sweet speeches could not end in actions. After all, Miss Claverton, you do not do well to scorn me, for I love you so madly—though you may not believe it. I could and would take you away from all this, to the beautiful skies of Italy, where I would shield you from all adverse winds, where no one would know anything of us; heedless, and caring nothing for the meaningless and foolish ceremonies of Society, we could live for love only!"

"Let me go, Mr. Vane!" she exclaimed, passionately; "I am not too innocent not to understand the drift of your last words—words which are quite worthy of your nobility and generosity are meaningless expressions to you, and I do not expect them from you now. I will thank you," she said, in a choked voice, her endurance was giving way, "to let me pass," and, as he moved involuntarily, before he could stop her, she darted past him, and fled, up the long, walk into the shrubbery, through the darkened conservatory, and gained her own room unnoticed. She flung herself down on the bed, when the stoniness gave way, and she burst into passionate, bitter weeping.

CHAPTER VIII

"We shall return to-morrow afternoon, Nora, my dear; so I hope you will rest, and get back a few roses before then," and Lady Ifsley smiled at her as she put on her cloak; "I could not refuse this invitation to Horsham Towers, you know; now our other guests are gone. I want you to send off that diamond brooch that wants a new pin, and the bracelet that is to be reset, to Collingwood's to-morrow. Here is the key of the cupboard, and you know the secret spring; don't you? You see how I trust you!"—putting Nora affectionately on the cheek—"It will be something pretty for you to look at; the Ifsley diamonds are famous, you know; one of the diamonds in a chain decorated the crown of the Great Mogul, and is said to be of enormous value; only don't run away with them, my dear," giving the keys laughingly.

"Oh! Lady Ifsley, what an idea!" exclaimed Nora; her cheeks paling involuntarily, a little more; they were very pale already; "I shall look on and admire, as in duty bound," she smiled faintly, "and I will be sure to send the things to Collingwood's."

"Very well. Now good-bye for the present; I hope to find you looking brighter to-morrow, don't you, Cecil?" as the door opened, and her nephew came in to the boudoir. He gave a quick glance at Nora, who flushed slightly, and cast down her eyes, so that she did not see the anxious glance he cast towards her, as he heard Lady Ifsley's words.

"Is Miss Claverton not well?" he asked, with a little tender undertone in his voice, as he came forward and held out his hand.

"I am quite well, thank you, only Lady Ifsley thinks I ought to have some more roses," and she tried to raise her clear eyes to his, and read in his own something which sent the bright colour flashing over her face and brow. It was only for a moment, but in that moment, both understood what was in the other's heart.

"It shall only be *au revoir*, till to-morrow," he said, softly, as Lady Ifsley returned, and the carriage was announced; then he reluctantly

let go her hand; and, as he turned to go out of the door, looked at her once more—a look which would have to last her through the weary, weary months to be before she would see that dear face again.

The door closed; she heard the carriage roll away, and a solemn silence settled over the great house; it seemed like the hush of a coming storm. Then, by-and-bye, could be heard the distant sighing of the trees, as the wind blew them about in fitful gusts, rising and falling in wailing crescendos and diminuendos, as the wind rose, and the gusts became sharper and louder. It was somewhat weird, Nora felt, to be alone in the great house, even though she had lamp and fire-light.

"It sounds like some imprisoned spirit meaning," she said to herself, as she took a light and went towards the tapestry-room, to do the behest of Lady Ifsley. It was sombre and gloomy here; the old tapestry, with its representations of smiling gods and goddesses disporting themselves in Elysium, looked heavy and dark; and she looked involuntarily towards the old panel behind which Lady Dorothy's husband had been saved, on which Mars was depicted, seated among the clouds; the eyes had always attracted her attention, they always seemed to follow one about the room. Now, however, she only glanced at them, intent upon getting out the jewels for Lady Ifsley, and packing them up safely; besides, it would be something to look at; and she pressed the spring of what looked like a picture, and disclosed the strong safe where the Ifsley diamonds were kept. One by one she took out the cases, how many there were she could not tell, but the riches dazzled her that were disclosed to her view, as she opened them and looked at the wonderful flashing stones, shining rivieres of flawless, priceless diamonds, each one a small fortune in itself; tiaras which a queen might have worn; bracelets and rings, brilliant stars, flashing and gleaming brighter than any in the firmament; long ropes of diamonds, pendants, aligettes; it seemed as though there were no end to them, and Nora gave a small sigh of wonder as she looked at them, and thought what a vast sum all these must represent.

"It seems hardly fair that all these should belong to one person," she thought, again, "Why, they must be worth a king's ransom!" as she took the light, and let it shine on the stones, flashing and sparkling in their velvet beds.

"Oh, how the wind has risen! It seemed as though some door were open," as she turned quickly to see, for a sudden gust of wind moaned round the house, and seemed to enter the room, somehow, for it almost blew out her lights. Where this wind could enter she could not tell, all the doors and windows were closely shut, but she felt it sharply, a cold whiff of outer air, only for a moment, as the wind died away in a shrill wail.

"I suppose this is the bracelet Lady Ifsley meant. Yes, the stone is out, and that is the brooch."

She shut the cases and put them carefully back to their snug recess, and all the while an oppressive feeling was stealing over her, a feeling that she could not name. Whether it was the stillness of the house and the moaning of the wind outside, round the gables and corners she could not say, but it was a sensation which almost choked her; it seemed as though the air around were peopled with horrors; she felt she was not alone, although when she looked round there was nothing to be seen but the everlastingly smiling figures of those gods and goddesses on the tapestry, though whether they were smiling or not, she could not see, for the mist of fear that was terrifying her, that and the darkness of the room. Hurriedly

she put the cases back. Surely that was a sound behind the tapestry. No, it must be the wind; it was howling now. With a sigh of relief she put back the last case, under closed the cupboard, and put back the keys in the cabinet; as she did so, she took the light and prepared to go out. Involuntarily her eyes flashed up towards the panel and the god Mars, which always attracted her, and her heart seemed to stop with a terror that almost froze her; the eyes—surely those were living, human eyes that were looking at that spot which she had just left! Good heavens! could there be anyone behind it? They were too bright for the eyes of a picture. She stooped to pick up the other cases, almost fainting with terror, then taking her light she ventured to raise it as she passed. The eyes were as she had always seen them; it must have been her frightened imagination; but the feeling of coming evil was creeping more surely over her, the feeling as though she were being closed in on every side, a terror increased by the moaning and sighing of the wind around her room. She thought she could distinguish a sound like, "Never more! never more!" It was the knell of her happiness and love. The firelight flickered on feebly, as she lay there on the bed, just as she had flung herself down, powerless to do more, half-fainting, in a state of semi-consciousness, unable to move or utter a sound. Then sleep did overtake her, a heavy sleep, that almost looked like a swoon, and she lay there motionless as a marble statue and almost as white.

Suddenly, however, she rose and sought for her light. The eyes were wide open, but in the lamplight one could see they had a fixed, unnatural stare.

Swiftly and steadily she opened her doors and passed out along the dark and polished corridors, through the little vestibule, where from the window a few moonbeams were seen struggling through the clouds, then on through the bed-room, the suite of rooms, with a swift steady step, never looking to right or left, and so noiselessly into the tapestry-room.

But the wide-open eyes never saw that a man with a lantern was in the room, and that the place where the diamonds reposed was open and that the cases were not there.

Silently she came forward, and put her hand up to where the spring would be, but only met the void, and at the same time the light was struck out of her hand, with a force that shivered it to atoms, and she woke to find the cry that rose to her lips stifled, as she was forced on the ground, and a strong hand was put over her mouth, and she caught sight of a masked face stooping over her, and felt the cold steel of a pistol close to her temples.

"Damn you! If you scream, I'll let you have a bullet and stop you," he said, without another oath, as she struggled to free herself, and found it in vain, and lay still, perfectly frozen with terror.

He rose, still keeping the muzzle of the pistol on her temple.

"If you make a sound, it's there," he said, a little less guardedly.

The voice! great and merciful! Heaven! it was Will's, her brother's!

Unable to restrain herself—"Will, is it you?" in a gasping, choked whisper.

"Nora! Great God, is it you?" The pistol dropped down, and he looked at her face for a moment speechless, then a hoarse voice was heard from the tapestry; "Where's the rest? Look sharp, and hand it over," and then someone advanced into the room.

"Damn it, what's up?" as he saw the two figures there.

"It's my sister, Nora," stammered William, who had for the moment lost his presence of mind.

"Well, you fool, are you going to let her

stop us?" was the answer, with a few oaths Nora shuddered to hear. "If she's going to round on us, we'd better silence her now," and he took out his pistol and held it close to Nora, who trembled in every limb and saw the tall form with its masked face bending over her. He would keep his word, she felt with a feeling of horror.

"Nora, you hear! If you peach, you'll soon be where the dead people are," said William, with a coarse laugh, as he put on a show of threatening bravado. "If you did, it wouldn't be a nice position for you, with all these fine folk, to know you had helped put your brother into prison, and were related to a gaol-bird."

A choking feeling came over her, these were the words of Curtis Vane, and she tried to rise on her knees and put out her hands mutely for mercy. Words would not come for a moment, then, in a terrified broken voice—"Will! Oh, Will! Why did you do this? Don't take them—don't!"

"Stow that!" and the pistol came close again. "We have no time, d—n you, to let your tongue wag. Are you going to round, or not?—answer—Bill, look out—it'll be worse for you if you do," and the two pistols were put to her temples, she could almost hear her own heart beat, tortured, agonised, as it was. The realisation of her vague terrors was worse than she had dreamed in her wildest flights of imagination. How could she decide? How could she deceive Lady Ifsley? How could she keep silence, she must let them know? But that would only condemn her own brother. She could not do that. "Oh, God! what shall I do?" she cried, in her heart, feeling the cold steel pressing closer to the burning temples. "What shall I do? I cannot let them be robbed like this, but then, oh Heaven! Cecil, and I love you so, but I cannot meet you again—it condemns me surely—I must go, leave them, disgraced." She shook and almost fell, but a rough hand dragged her up and the steel was again pressed harder.

"Answer, or by —! I'll shoot you like a rabbit; do you think we'll let you stand in our way? Quick, answer!" and he shook her roughly.

"I will not betray you," in a low, shuddering whisper, "if you will let me go with you, I cannot stay here, I should break my word, and I—I—will not interfere with you."

She fell forward on to the low chair standing near.

Good-bye to all her love; fool, wicked she had been to dream of it, and now—oh! Heaven, to think her brother should have fallen so low.

"There is nothing left for me in life, and perhaps, I may try to keep back William from further sin. Good-bye—to the world, to life—to love, and everything. An outcast, like myself, has no right to look at anyone. Oh! Cecil—for the last time I will say it—good-bye for ever!"

There were no tears, she was utterly frozen with terror, grief, and shame. To her dazed brain came only the sound of the meaning wind, which was sobbing and wailing round. Never more! Never more! rising and falling like the voice of a banshee.

"Come with us!" was the sharp command. "But look you that you make no sound, we have not a moment to lose," and before she could say anything she felt herself taken roughly through the tapestry, down the secret stairs, and out at last into the garden, in the wind and rain, across the park, only a few moonbeams glittering on the distant lake, in fitful gleams. Under the dripping trees, and out to the road, staggering blindly on, dragged by the rough relentless grasp. Fainting and almost senseless, she was at last half flung into a carriage and driven away,

whither she neither knew nor cares, for she was now unconscious to all that passed.

(To be continued.)

A NOTE OF INVITATION.

—3—

When Bessie noticed the furious steam-cloud proceeding from the kettle on the stove, she rushed across the big, barn-like kitchen and pushed back the utensil to a cooler corner.

"Now, what do you mean," demanded Miss Bertha Blind, who had that moment entered, "by interfering with my cooking?"

Her niece—or at least Bessie was so known, although in reality her grand-niece—felt a trifle indignant at the tone employed.

"I did not intend to interfere, aunt," she asserted, with some spirit; "but the beef was boiling so hard it was almost certain to be tough."

"Tough!" snorted Miss Bertha, grudgingly breaking a few packed eggs into the batter pudding she was making. "Do you suppose I want the meat to be tender?"—this with an intonation of the most pronounced sarcasm.

"Well, yes," frankly admitted the girl, "I did."

Miss Bertha snorted again.

Forty-five very frigid winters had she seen. She was stout and undersized. She had a round face, a round nose, teeth of suspicious snowiness and regularity, and a complexion mottled as laundry soap of a particular brand.

"You did!" scornfully. "You'd be a great one to run a boarding-house! If you were to give your boarders tender meat and mealy potatoes, where in the world would your hash for the following morning come from?"

"I—I don't know, aunt."

"Of course you don't. Last Tuesday, when you cooked the stewed tomatoes, the seasoning made them taste so well there wasn't enough to thin out into tomato soup for dinner next day left over."

At this awful charge Bessie looked rather aghast.

She was a quiet little maiden, who had come up from her comfortable and pleasant country home to visit her aunt in London.

There never was a girl more amazed than she. She had discovered that it is not only in comic opera that skid milk masquerades as cream. The constant pretences, subterfuges, and stratagems of Miss Blind's boarding-house were to her novel as repellent.

"But," she now ventured, timidly, "you are always saying that you find it so hard to collect from your boarders the money due you. Don't you think they might pay more promptly if they had everything very nice?"

"No such thing!" snapped Miss Bertha. "It does not pay to educate the tastes of people. The more you humour them, the more they expect. Besides, when one sets a tempting table, the boarders eat too much, and then blame their food for giving them indigestion."

To this remarkable argument no reply was possible.

"Now," Miss Bertha supplemented, briskly, as the clock struck ten, "we must rush to get the breakfast for Mr. Clarke, before it is time to put on the vegetables for dinner. I declare, it is too bad to think of that ungrateful girl having walked off this morning without giving me an hour's notice!"

Bessie laughed. She had a delicious laugh, spontaneous and mirthful.

"Well, what is Mr. Clarke to have for his breakfast?"

"Oh, broil him a couple of those mutton chops, and slice one of the tomatoes—only

one, they are so dear yet—and make him a parsley omelet and a cup of coffee. Will you see to it, like a good child?"

"If you wish."

"I do. Your mother has made an excellent cook of you. I am anxious to please Mr. Clarke. It is rather strange that he is content to remain here at all. He is rich, you know, and his social position is of the best."

Bessie, beating the yolks for the omelet, intimated that he must be willing to pay for the extra trouble his meals at unusual hours occasioned.

"Oh, yes, he pays liberally—and in advance at that."

The spring sunshine, filtering in through the dingy kitchen window, was alluringly bright and mellow.

The girl longed to be out in it, walking the marvellous streets, and gazing in at the shops, which to her unaccustomed eyes were always a fresh delight.

She felt slightly resentful toward Mr. Clarke that he should occasion so much additional work. But then, if her aunt was satisfied—and on the few evenings she had chanced to meet him since coming to the house, he had been extremely courteous to her.

So, by the time the coffee was carefully prepared, the chops juicily and crisply broiled, and the solitary tomato sliced delicately and with precision, she was once more her gay and contented self.

"Now," stated Miss Blind, with a glance at the breakfast, which, under Bessie's trained fingers was fast nearing perfection, "I'll run up stairs and get on my apron and fichu. I make a point of serving Mr. Clarke his meals myself. He always enjoys a chat with me so much."

"Yes."

The word was uttered indifferently, but Miss Bertha construed it into an expression of sympathetic attention. She thawed, beamed, and waxed confidential.

"I don't mind telling you, Bessie, that I think—that is, I fancy—Mr. Clarke is tired of a lonely existence."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bessie, her heart suddenly sinking with a new, strange sense of pain.

If Mr. Clarke were to marry her aunt, or anyone else, what difference would it make to her?

At that moment the step of Mr. Clarke descended the stairs, and at the same instant the door-bell rang.

"Answer the bell, Bessie," urged Miss Bertha, who was distracted between the fear that Mr. Clarke should behold her without her fichu, and the possibility that the person demanding admission might prove an applicant for her long vacant back bedroom.

"No," replied Bessie, rebelliously. "If I leave his omelet now it will be ruined."

Miss Bertha paused, irresolute.

Must Bessie serve Mr. Clarke? The girl was pretty—alarmingly pretty. Her hair was brown and her skin was brown; but the former had a certain golden lustre, and the latter was dashed in the round cheeks with flickering rose. There never were lovelier dimples than Bessie's, and her eyes of deepest violet were shy as a fawn's and dauntless as a child's.

Again the bell rang. Go she must. But if the new-comer could be at once dismissed, she might still be back in time to attend herself to the most esteemed lodger, who was now waiting in the basement dining-room.

"If it's someone to see the second floor back, you must give Mr. Clarke his breakfast, Bessie," she said.

Off she went, puffing and wrathful.

Bessie went into the hall, and listened. It was a lady to see the apartment to rent.

Bessie detested waiting on anyone. But Mr. Clarke's morning meal could not be allowed to become cold and uninviting. She carried it in to him, and poured out his coffee.

"Good-morning, Miss Bessie," he said, laying down his paper. "Where is Anne?"

"She has gone."

"And Miss Blind?"

"She"—rather shortly—"is busy."

He went on eating his breakfast, quite assured that never before in Miss Blind's boarding-house had such a perfectly-cooked chop, such aromatic coffee, such a golden and feathery puff of an omelet, fallen to his appreciative appetite. A sudden thought struck him.

"Did you cook my breakfast, Miss Bessie?"

She nodded rather sulkily. She hated to be praised—to be made conspicuous. And if he was to marry her Aunt Bertha—well, she almost wished he was not so agreeable and distinguished-looking. Why? Indeed, she did not know why herself.

Sydney Clarke was of medium height, slender, muscular, graceful. His face, if just touched with sadness, was handsome, sensitive, and refined.

Occasionally he had succeeded in drawing Bessie into conversation, and their interchange of ideas had proved mutually pleasant; but to-day he endeavoured in vain to arouse her interest.

With singular sensitiveness, she deemed herself less a guest in the house than the temporary servant of her aunt.

When he rose to leave, he bowed and smiled, and something of comradeship and admiration in his final glance thrilled the girl strangely.

As for Sydney Clarke, all day long, in the press of business and of brain labour, he kept recalling her face. What exquisite suggestions it held of daisies, of primroses, of all fresh, sweet, woodland blossoms!

When out of a whirling maelstrom of ideas one evolved itself, he instantly captured, appropriated it. The result of this appropriation was the penning of a note, which he tore up. Two others shared the same fate. The fourth attempt partially satisfied him, so he sent it up to Briar Street, with instructions to the boy to wait for an answer.

Apparently, the reply was to Mr. Clarke's complete satisfaction, as he gave the messenger a dollar for himself.

That evening, Miss Blind's most esteemed lodger did not return to supper, but not long after, a carriage stopped at the door, and the gentleman who alighted let himself in with his latchkey.

As he entered the lighted parlour, a youthful figure, gowned all in soft blue cashmere, advanced to meet him. Very winsome she looked with some ivory lace at her throat and a knot of crimson chrysanthemums at her bosom.

Aunt Bertha will be down in a minute," she said.

"Wh-ah?"

He stepped back and regarded her blankly.

"Aunt Bertha will be down in a minute," she repeated. "Ah, there she is!"

Assuredly, to his inexpressible consternation, there she was, descending the stairs, quite dazzling in amber brocade and feather-trimmed wrap.

"But—but," blurted out the poor fellow, in uncontrollable dismay, "it was you I asked to go with me to the musicale at my sister's to-night, Miss Bessie. I wrote her you would come."

Like a flash he had remembered he had addressed his note of invitation to "Miss B. Blind." He had failed to recall, if indeed he ever knew, that the name of his landlady was Bertha.

Bessie was the only name in the whole world for him. He had not now spoken loudly, but she who had unhesitatingly decided the note received was intended for her, heard every word.

In friendly fashion she bustled in, giving to her boarder a cordial nod and to her niece a kindly smile. Both were agitated and guiltily pale as conspirators.

"Why, Bessie, not dressed yet?" she cried, in laughing reproof. "Is it possible you believed my joke that Mr. Clarke intended his invitation for me? Indeed, no! I have an engagement with the Trents to go to the theatre to-night. Sister Agnes is to stay here till to-morrow. Your dress looks very well. Run and get your wraps. I did not suppose you would imagine me in earnest."

Blushing and laughing, Bessie flew off to dress. Miss Bertha talked cheerfully to Mr. Clarke till her return. Then she stood in the doorway, watching the carriage roll off. Waiting no longer for the Trents, she went slowly and heavily up stairs. She took off her gleaming dress and her jewelry. She put on an old wrapper. She descended to the basement and there re-read, previous to burning, a note of invitation. Two tears plashed down upon it.

When Bessie came in she was radiant. She went up to her aunt and kissed her.

"I must go home to-morrow," she said. "I must tell papa and mamma at once that—that in the fall I am coming to live in the city all the time. Sydney says—"

"Yes, yes!" hastily. "I'm very glad, of course. But I'm sleepy, too. I wish you would taste that hash on the kitchen table that I chopped for breakfast, and tell me if you think it will stand a little more potato. I'm short of meat. That corned beef was too tender. I told you it would be."

FRED CLIVE'S HEIRESS,

—10:—

"Well," said Mr. Clive, shaking the July raindrops off the brim of his straw hat, "brother Dick is dead at last."

"Dead!" screamed his better—and larger—half, taking her hands instinctively out of the bread pan. "My goodness me! I thought he never would die. Folks have no business to hang on like that, after they've outlived their usefulness. Where was he when he died, Fred?"

"On the steamer, coming here from Quebec."

"The most expensive place he could have selected to die in!" groaned Mrs. Clive. "And I suppose you will have to pay all the expenses!"

Fred Clive echoed his wife's groan.

"I don't see," sharply commented Mrs. Clive, "what possessed him to go away in the first place. Everybody knows what it costs to travel. If the Lord meant he should get well, he'd a' got well here. I think all this American business is flying in the face of Providence. What's he left?"

Fred retreated before the magnetic force of this question.

"Left?" he repeated, vaguely. "He's left his daughter."

"His—daughter! To us?"

He nodded.

Mrs. Clive's brow darkened.

"Well, then, I'd have you to know," said she, "I don't want any such legacy as that. We've got daughters enough of our own—four—and two boys coming on. No, I won't have any simpering, fine lady miss from America, coming here to put on airs, and—Eh? What are you making faces at me for?"

"Hush!" he whispered, raising his horny forefinger. "She's there!"

"Where? In the parlour? You've never brought her here?"

"I had to. There was nowhere else to bring her. I couldn't leave her at the shipping office, could I? Nor yet in the cemetery, where they put poor Dick's body?" argued Fred.

"I—I'm very sorry," murmured a soft voice, as a slight figure all in black glided forward. "Please, Aunt Clive, try to love me a little! It's as Uncle Fred says—there was nowhere else for me to go."

"Just as I thought," inwardly commented Mrs. Clive. "An out-and-out fine lady, simper, white hands and all."

But, nevertheless, there was somewhat of embarrassment in her tone as she took the girl's small, black-gloved hand in hers for a second or two, and then dropped it, after a flabby fashion, saying:

"Well, I would not have spoken just exactly as I did if I had supposed you were listening, but all the same it's gospel truth, Miss Clive."

"Won't you call me Dora?"

"It's a queer, outlandish name," said the farmer's wife, tartly. "Rebecca and Eunice and Sarah and Hannah—honest Scripture names—are good enough for my girls. But, what I was saying is this: We're poor folks here, and the farm is mortgaged way up above its real value. That's your Uncle Fred's way of doing business—with a scornful glance at her husband—"and everyone here has to work."

"I am willing to work, Aunt," faltered poor Dora, a scarlet spot rising to either cheek.

"Hannah is a teacher," pursued the elder woman. "Sarah is in Miss Black's dress-making place, Eunice supports herself at glove making, and Rebecca packs in the wholesale sweet manufactory. There are no drones in this hive."

"But I couldn't do any of these things, Aunt Clive."

"You can do something else, can't you?"

Dora Clive looked piteously at her uncle, her lips quivered and her eyes brimmed over with tears.

"You said she would be a mother to me, Uncle Fred," she faltered.

"It's her notion of being a mother, my dear," reassured the farmer, with a chuckle. "She always was a pusher, your Aunt Maria."

"Folks has to push in this world," said Mrs. Clive, sharply. "But there's no occasion for you to burst out crying like a baby! Tired?"—in response to her husband's whisper—

"Well, I'm tired, too, but I don't sit down and cry about it. Here, Dora—if that's the name I've got to call you by—I'll fix you a cup of tea, and then, I guess, you'd better lie down a bit and rest."

And this was the welcome that Dora Clive received to her native land.

The four cousins regarded her as four speckled barnyard fowls might view a golden pheasant which had strayed into their regions by some strange mistake.

"Pretty!" echoed Miss Sarah. "What's pa thinking about? She's too slim and pale to be pretty."

Eunice giggled.

"She pronounces her words so queer!" said she. "And wasn't ma vexed when she broke the handle of the new cream jug?"

And Rebecca, with a goodly cylinder of the "stock in trade" between her teeth, opined that "she guessed ma would make the girl earn her living before she got through. She was glad it wasn't her!"

But when Hannah, the eldest hope, came home to spend Saturday and Sunday, she was full of newer and more startling ideas.

"Cousin Dora is here just in time," said

she. "Miss Mayne, the head trustee's daughter, is coming here to tea on Sunday, with her cousin, the new curate. He is to preach in our church, you see, and I want things awfully stylish. The Maynes have a parlourmaid, who hands things round, and I don't want to be behind them in the fashion—eh, Dora?"

"What does the girl mean?" demanded Mrs. Clive.

But Hannah was her favourite, and she smiled on her, in the midst of her perplexity.

"I don't think I quite understand," said Dora, gently.

"You see," pursued Hannah, "the Maynes don't know who you are. Now couldn't you just put on a cap and apron, Cousin Dora, and wait at the table—just this once? I do so want to make a good impression."

Dora coloured.

"I couldn't," said she. "Don't ask me, Hannah, please! Oh! I couldn't!"

"Oh, just as you like!" said Hannah, with a toss of her head. "Only when folks are living on their relations, I don't think they ought to back down when there's a chance to make themselves a little useful."

"I should think," grimly spoke Aunt Maria, siding at once with her daughter, "that you might try to oblige Hannah in a trifle like this."

Dora looked from Mrs. Clive to Hannah, as a startled fawn might look at its pursuers.

Were they indeed in the right? Was she absurdly fastidious?

"Well," said she, with an embarrassed laugh, "I will. After all, it will be only a sort of masquerade. And it is true what you say—I do owe a debt of gratitude to you, aunt, and uncle. I am eating their bread and dwelling under their roof. Where's the cap and apron?"

"Oh, will you, really?" cried Hannah, gleefully, dancing up and down. "And you'll set the table yourself, won't you, Dora? With all those little foreign touches of fruit and flowers and things? I'll show Annie Mayne that some folks can do things as well as others!"

Dora cried a little in her room—the smallest and hottest in the house, when the broiling sun beat down on the roof by day, and mice and rats kept grand carnival by night—before she went down in her new impersonation, with a ruffled apron, a dainty white cap perched on the top of her nut-brown tresses, and a Japanese tray in her hand; but there was no trace of tears on her cheek as she obeyed Aunt Maria's call of:

"Dora! Dora! I'm just ready to ring the bell!"

At the head of the table sat Mr. Clive in his Sunday suit, looking extremely awkward. Mrs. Clive, deep in the mysteries of cookery, wisely kept in the background. The three sisters were ranged stiffly on each side, and Hannah, all smiles and graciousness, presided behind the tea equipage.

Miss Mayne, a dashing damsel, with peony cheeks, larkspur blue eyes, and a general floral effect to her dress, sat next to her hostess on one side, and a tall, pleasant-looking young man, in clerical black, occupied the other post of honour.

"Goodness me!" cried Miss Mayne, in an audible whisper, as she accepted her first cup of tea from Dora's salver, "what a pretty maid-servant you've got! Where did you pick her up?"

At the same moment Mr. Graham glanced up, and rose abruptly to his feet.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's the same young lady that lost her way in Quebec! I beg your pardon Miss—Miss—I never quite caught your name; you know. The hotel people called you Cliff when I en-

quired the next day; but your party had just gone. How strange that I should meet you here!"

He rose, and cordially offered his hand. Hannah, completely thrown off her guard, sat staring, with the cream-pitcher in one hand. Miss Mayne opened her red-lipped mouth wide; and poor Dora, confronted as it were with the past and the sad, sweet memories of by-gone days, dropped her tray and burst into tears.

"A pretty flare-up!" said Miss Hannah, afterwards. "Ma had to bring the things in herself; and a nice spectacle she was, with her old cooking-apron and her red face. And Eunice had to take the camphor bottle in to Dora, and Mr. Graham kept making inquiries after her, and wouldn't be satisfied unless she came into the room herself to assure him that she was neither dying nor dead. I never was so mortified in all my days."

"It was all a mistake," said Mr. Clive, "Brother Dick's daughter oughtn't to have been set to work as a waiter-girl in my house."

"A mistake; Yes!" snapped his wife; "but the mistake was in ever taking the lazy, notional creature into the house. Anyhow, she can't stay here any longer. I've had enough of her."

"Yes," averred Hannah, sharply, "the factory is good enough for our Eunice, and I guess she ain't no better than Eunice."

"Hannah's jealous," chuckled the farmer, "because the parson paid more attention to Dora than he did to her."

"Don't talk nonsense, pa!" said Hannah, spitefully.

And so Poor Dora's fate was sealed.

"I meant no harm," said the girl, faintly. "It all came back to me so suddenly—but, indeed, I'll try to be brave now."

"We've had enough of you and your trying," said Aunt Maria, grimly.

But the factory was not destined to be Dora's final refuge. Miss Mayne, ambitious to become a French scholar, and impressed by Mr. Graham's account of Miss Clive's Parisian accent, offered her a small salary to become nursery governess in the Mayne family and private instructress to herself.

"It'll only end in one thing," said Mr. Clive. "That's parson's three-quarters in love with Dora already; and this'll fetch the other quarter, see if it don't. Anne Mayne don't care; she's engaged to Young Chip, the druggist. But it's hard on our Hannah, ain't it now?"

"I wish you wouldn't be so silly, Silas," said Mrs. Clive, with asperity.

Only a few days had elapsed, when the evening train brought a stiff, black-dressed stranger to the farm—Mr. Todd, a lawyer, from London.

"I am here," said he, in his odd, precise way, "to carry out the rather unusual provisions of Mr. Fred Clive's last will and testament."

"Will?" repeated the farmer. "Brother Fred's will? Why, he had nothing to leave! He died as he had lived—poor as a church mouse."

Mr. Todd raised his white brows. He smiled.

"Mr. Fred Clive was a very peculiar person," said he, "secretive to the last degree. Even his own daughter never knew that those ventures he made in Manchester railway stock turned out trump cards. And his will provided that she should be kept in utter ignorance of the same until six months subsequent to his death. The six months have now expired. His plan of thus testing the real and disinterested affection of his relatives has probably accomplished its purpose, and I am finally at liberty to divulge the fact that Miss Dora Clive is heiress to ten thousand pounds."

Mr. Clive sprang to his feet, flung his battered hat up into the air, and rushed out of the back-kitchen like a cyclone.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" he yelled. "Do you hear that, wife? Parson Graham and our Dora won't have to go to housekeeping on sixpence a day after all! Do you hear? Mr. Todd says the girl's worth ten thousand pounds!"

"What are you talking about," says Mrs. Clive, appearing from the scullery, and wiping her hands on her apron as she came. "I guess you are dreaming."

"Never was wider awake in my life," protested her husband. "Mrs. Frost told me this morning that Mr. Graham and our little girl were engaged, and now she's fell heir to a mint of money. Hurrah! hurrah! I never was so glad since the year one!"

Mrs. Clive glared reproachfully at him.

"I declare, Clive," said she, "one would think you had not four unmarried daughters of your own and a house mortgaged up to the roof into the bargain!"

"For all that," persisted Dick, "brother Fred's daughter is a good girl, and I am glad she's come across a streak of luck."

But when Dora, the heiress, came down to the farm house to ask her aunt to come to the informal wedding, and to whisper to her uncle that the mortgage should be lifted at once, and his heart's desire, a new barn, built that very autumn on the back meadow, Mrs. Clive's heart melted.

"Silas is right," said she. "Fred's daughter is a good girl, and I'm sorry I treated her just as I did. Ten thousand pounds! It's a big sum, but Dora deserves it."

FACETIÆ.

"How treacherous the ocean is!" "Yes, it is full of craft."

A young lady, not well versed in music, wants to know if dance music is written in foot notes.

PROFESSOR: "What animal is most faithful to man?" Lovesick Student (enthusiastically): "Woman!"

WHY is X the most unfortunate of letters? Because it is always in a fix and never out of perplexity.

He (who is going abroad to seek his fortune): "You'll be true to me, won't you, darling?" She: "Ye—yes, George, if—if you're successful."

A. (at Ramsgate): "I wonder why the ocean is so restless?" B.: "How could you expect it to lie easy with so many rocks in its bed?"

A BASHFUL young clergyman, recently rising to preach for the first time, announced his text in this wise: "And immediately the cock wept and Peter went out and crew bitterly."

MRS. VASSAR: "Do you believe that lady is 105 years old, as she claims?" Mr. Vassar: "I presume it's so. She knows how to knit stockings."

"WHY, Jackson, this isn't a bit the kind of a house I supposed you would build." "No; I'm rather surprised myself, but the architect is very well satisfied."

PROFESSOR: "What do you think of my reform?" Abigail: "I don't like it at all. It doesn't interfere with the rights of enough persons."

TAKE AWAY my first letter; take away my second letter; take away third letter; take away all my letters, and I remain what I was before. Answer—The Postman.

SHE (having talked for an hour): "You must think I am very fond of the sound of my own voice." He (politely): "You said you liked music."

MRS. DE SMYTHE (nouveau riche, to Mrs. Van der Bloo, ancien pauvre): "How sweetly you are looking this afternoon, dear. I always admired that gown; I hope it will never wear out."

SOCIETY.

THE German Emperor has been known to change his costume 12 times in 18 hours. His wardrobe contains more than 1,000 suits.

WITH the fashion of wearing the hair parted and fast above the forehead we find bonnets with the Mary Stuart point once more with us.

YOUNG men—some of them—are wearing their ties drawn through curious-looking buckles, after the old style of running the scarf through a ring.

THE Princess of Wales has commissioned Mr. Söberg, the Danish artist, who is now in England, to draw for her a large portrait of the Duke of York, in black and white, which is to be hung in her boudoir at Sandringham.

COLOURED veils are the last Parisian fancy. A fine brown Russian net, almost invisible in texture and with soft chenille spots, is peculiarly becoming; and so is the newest shade of rose, if our sober Englishwomen will but believe it.

THE Queen's next public appearance in London will be at the opening of the Imperial Institute, which function will take place about the second week in May. Her Majesty has promised the Prince of Wales that she will herself open the Institute.

THE Duke and Duchess of Teck, with Princess Victoria Mary of Teck, are now going about again performing social duties and making visits, as was their wont previous to the death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale. Princess Victoria Mary, as it is the Queen's wish that she shall be called, is very well and looking exceedingly pretty.

THE Emperor William went from Potsdam to Homburg recently for the purpose of personally requesting the Empress Frederick to become the godmother of his daughter. This visit shows that the recent attentions of the Empress Frederick to Princess Bismarck and Count Wilhelm Bismarck had the approval of her son, who is evidently contemplating a reconciliation with Prince Bismarck. The Emperor travelled all night in his new train, which is a marvel of luxury and comfort.

THE Duke of York is staying at Heidelberg among associations closely connected with his brother, who was a great favourite with those who knew him best at the German University town. The Duke is fond of talking of his brother, to whom he was much attached, and many reminiscences of the late Prince's stay are gone over with him. His Royal Highness's stay is in order that he may become quite familiar with the German language, which is almost a necessity for a future King of England, now that our relations with the German Empire are so close. His Royal Highness is expected home before the end of the year, when it is surmised that he will occupy the house in St. James's Palace prepared for the Duke of Clarence and Avondale, and there set up a bachelor establishment for some months.

It is not generally known that the Queen has taken in recent years to having pet birds in her own private rooms. At first canaries were tried at the suggestion of the Princess Beatrice, with whom the yellow songster is a favourite, but the Queen found the noise too trying, and at the present moment she has with her a bullfinch and a linnet. These are under the care of one of the attendants, and always follow the Court wherever it goes, except across the Channel. There is a special cage in the royal train for the comfort of the feathered pets when travelling, just as provision is also made for Spot, Marco, and Roy, the favourite terrier, Pomeranian, and collie of the Queen, who share a first-class compartment with the tapissier and the plain clothes police officer. It is a curious fact that Her Majesty has never shown any special fondness for peacocks, who are to be found in most of the royal palaces of Europe. A pair was presented to her once by the late Lord Beaconsfield, but they have been dead for many years and were never replaced.

STATISTICS.

AMONG two hundred million of the world's population slavery still exists.

ONE advertising tea-merchant sells a million packets of tea every week.

IT is estimated that nearly twenty thousand pounds of bread are daily eaten in the Sultan of Turkey's household.

LONDON'S six principal railway lines carry annually over two hundred million people, and the tramways about one hundred and fifty million.

THE microscope has revealed many wonders, among others that the common caterpillar has four thousand muscles in his body, that the drone bee's eyes each contain thirty-three hundred mirrors, and that the large eye of a dragonfly has twenty-eight thousand lenses.

GEMS.

THE law of the harvest is to reap more than you sow. Sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.

GOOD manners consist in making those people easy with whom we converse. Whoever makes the fewest people uneasy is the best bred in the company.

NOTHING so much increases one's reverence for others as a great sorrow to one's self. It teaches one the depths of human nature. In happiness we are shallow, and deem others so.

THE beauty of the human face depends largely on the indefinable thing called expression. While it is impossible to tell what is meant by expression the idea is familiar to all.

It is utterly impossible for the best men to please the whole world; and the sooner that is understood, and a position taken in view of this fact, the better. Do right, though you have enemies.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

OATMEAL ROLLS.—To a vegetable dish of cold oatmeal add one tablespoonful of melted butter, one egg, one pint of hot milk, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, and flour enough to mould easily, or they can be dropped from a spoon into gem irons. Bake in a hot oven, watching carefully.

RICE AND APPLE PUDDING.—Soak evaporated apples and chop small. Mix three cups of the apples with one cup of washed rice, with or without one or two spoonfuls of desiccated coconut. Fill even full with the apple juice or water, and cook two or three hours in double-boiler (in a bowl, not in metal). Serve warm or cold with or without dressing. This can be baked in a pipkin in a slow oven.

RING JUMBLES.—Beat one breakfastcupful of butter to a cream with one of sugar, add half a cup of sour cream, one egg, one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in hot water, grated nutmeg to taste, and enough sifted dry flour to mix into a light, soft dough. Line the baking-pan with buttered paper, drop the dough with a tablespoon, forming it into rings, bake quickly in a brisk oven, and sift sugar over them when done. Any favourite flavour can be used instead of the rosewater.

TEA PANCAKES.—One breakfast cupful of flour, one egg, three-quarter teaspoonful baking soda, quarter teaspoonful tartaric acid, one dessert spoonful of sugar, three-quarter breakfast cupful of buttermilk. Mix the flour, soda, sugar, and tartaric acid together; beat the egg up, and put the milk among it. Mix this in smoothly among the flour, &c., and beat it quite smooth. Pour it all into a jug. Grease a griddle with a little bit of fat. Pour the mixture on in round spots and fry both sides.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SPAIN has fewer daily papers than any other European country.

THERE is more intoxication in Belgium than in any other country in Europe.

BRICKS made of plaster of Paris and cork are now used in the construction of powder mills. In case of explosion they offer slight resistance, and are broken to atoms.

JAPANESE jugglers are deft smokers. Several of them will sit before a curtain, and with the tobacco smoke which issues from their mouths will form a succession of readable letters.

IN some of the Swiss hotels you not only place outside your door on retiring your shoes, but your clothes also—those which you wish brushed. A hook is placed on the doorcase on which to hang your clothes.

A DISTINCT race of Hebrews, called the "White Jews" dwell in Cochin, south-west India. They comprise about 200 persons. They have dwelt there for hundreds of years, and have fair skin and light hair.

NEWFOUNDLAND exhibits much originality in its stamp designs. It has on various issues a seal, a codfish, a Newfoundland dog's head, Her Majesty in a widow's cap, the Prince of Wales in uniform, and a whaler in full sail.

DROWNING, as a punishment for crime, was legally enforced in Scotland up to the year 1611. The same punishment prevailed in England up to a few years before this date. By the laws of Burgundy a faithless wife was smothered in mud.

PARIS makes much of its shade trees. The transplanting of large trees is done there with perhaps greater success than anywhere else. It is now proposed to make an official inspection of all the trees in the city, with the view of removing those that are not healthy, and substituting trees that are.

NUTMEGS have strong narcotic properties. A drink that used to be made by our grandmothers was nutmeg tea. One or two nutmegs would make a pint or a pint and a half of tea, and the invalid would drink it, producing a sleep of many hours' duration. The symptoms would be about the same as opium. Nutmeg in the quantity of two or three drachms will cause both stupor and delirium.

SOME of the ordinary expressions of the Chinese are sarcastic enough. A blustering, harmless fellow they call "a paper tiger." When a man values himself overmuch they compare him to a "rat falling into a scale and weighing itself." Overdoing a thing they call "a hunchback making a bow." A spendthrift they compare to "a rocket which goes off at once." Those who expend their charity on remote objects, but neglect their family, are said "to hang their lantern on a pole, which is seen afar, but gives no light below."

THE ostrich-feather is characterised by having the quill exactly in the centre of the feather, while in other birds it is a little on one side, causing the fringe on either side to be of unequal width. The elegance of the feathers, arising doubtless from their beautifully tapering shafts and delicate gossamer webs, has led to their being valued highly as articles of ornament in all ages. The Egyptians are supposed to have venerated them as a symbol of justice, from the fact of the width of the webs being equally balanced on both sides of the shaft.

THE largest oak now standing in England is the "Cowthorpe," which measures 78ft. in circumference at the ground. At one time this tree and its branches covered more than an acre of space. The gigantic old "Parliamentary Oak" in Clipstone Park, London, is believed to be 1,500 years old. The tallest oak on the British Isles is called the Duke's Walkingstick. It is higher than the spire of Westminster Abbey. The oak of Gelemons, which was felled in 1810 realised £370 for its owner; the bark was sold for £200, and the trunk and branches for £670 more.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

JILL.—Lichfield is a city and "county of a city."
MINX.—Write again. Some parts of the letter are quite illegible.
T. B.—Preston wills are proved at the district registry at Preston.
MOTHER.—We cannot say without examination. Your best plan is to consult a surgeon personally.
F. G.—Henry Wainwright was executed at Newgate on December 21, 1875.
TOMMIE.—The "Best History of Hallow E'en" is to be found in Chambers's "Book of Days."
T. D. U.—If a debt has not been acknowledged in writing for six years it cannot be recovered.
ANXIETY.—It is a nervous condition, which you must not trouble about if you wish it to disappear.
ONE IN DEEP TROUBLE.—No length of absence justifies re-marriage. A divorce must first be obtained.
TOMMY ATEINS.—Old coins have no standard value; they are worth what they fetch at sales of such things.
BOB.—If a private Act of Parliament is still in print any bookseller can obtain a copy for you.
T. S.—There are many screws that are not nails, therefore it is necessary to say screw-nail.
H. L.—The mean temperature of Calcutta in January is 65·3 degrees Fahrenheit, and in July 82·6 d. grees.
JANET.—It would be wise to go at once to a competent dentist and have your teeth looked after.
C. F. M.—For the trial of militia the court-martial must be composed of militia officers only.
GRIP.—A seaport town is a port into which the salt sea flows and ebbs, not a port upon a tidal river.
DISTRESS.—A man is not liable to contribute towards the support of his brother's children.
WORRIED MOTHER.—It is a case for hospital treatment, and we advise you to have it seen to without delay.
GLADSTONIAH.—Mr. Gladstone was born in Rodney Street, Liverpool, in the house which is now numbered 64.
ENQUIRER.—The instrument you mean is a metro-nome. The price in walnut wood, with bell, would be about 17s. 6d.
AN ADMIRER.—Lord Cardigan received only a slight wound in the leg in the Balaklava charge. He died in 1868.
W. T.—The only way to get the date would be to hunt up the newspapers, a most laborious and tiresome process.
SISTER ANNE.—Whichever the English law reaches the man would be considered liable, and be compelled to support his wife and family.
SUFFERING ONE.—Yours is a case which must be seen and carefully examined by a physician. The chief thing to do is to get at the exact cause.
OLD MAID.—It is the male tortoise-shell cat that is so highly valued, because rarely met with; tabbies are by no means uncommon.
YEOMAN.—A will can be seen any day on payment of a fee of one shilling. The cost of a copy would depend upon the length.
GOOGLES.—There is no official notification of watch-makers being employed by Government in army, navy, or any other force under Government.
UNHAPPY ONE.—A wife can obtain a divorce only on the grounds of her husband's adultery and desertion, or adultery and cruelty.
MICAWBER.—The landlord can distrain while any balance of the debt remains unpaid. The bailiffs can remain in possession until the debt is paid.
MERCEDES.—Nearly all the novels of Alexandre Dumas have been translated into English. You could obtain a list from any good bookseller.
JEDY.—Try first what a good brushing over with warm water and curd soap will do. Then, when dry, go over the stains—if any remain—with turpentine.
CURIOUS.—A sentence of penal servitude may be reduced—by one-third in the total—on account of the convict's good conduct in prison.
BARBIFUL.—It would not be at all disrespectful to send small presents to your cousins. It is not necessary to include their father and mother in your generosity.
IN PERPLEXTY.—If the husband has given notice to a particular tradesman not to trust his wife he is not liable for any debt she may incur of him.
ATHLETIC.—Dumb-bells are useful in expanding the chest, &c. You should not use them too long at a time, nor should they be heavier than three pounds each.
A. K.—All Shropshire wills are deposited at the Probate Registry at Shrewsbury. Personal application must be made for a copy of any will.
NORMAN.—If you were never sworn in you never really "joined" the Volunteers, and the corps has no claim on you either for uniform or anything else.
FRIEDEL.—If a registered letter does not come back you should understand it has been delivered, but can make sure by writing to the postmaster of the town.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—Of course it is a quack publication, and simply intended to swindle the weak-minded and credulous out of their money. All the statements contained in it are incorrect.

GAFFER.—A deserter is subject to a term of imprisonment, but the amount of punishment would no doubt be determined by the circumstances of the particular case.

A LOVER OF THE LONDON READER.—If the window has not been in existence for 30 years you are fully entitled to construct any erection or screen on your own land to prevent your property from being overlooked.

A BEGINNER.—As far as mere speed in writing shorthand is concerned eighty words per minute would do for a junior place; but shorthand is after all a mere secondary qualification in a reporter.

Y. T. Y.—You might dispose of the book, which is not, by the way, of any special value, to a secondhand bookseller in your own place, or to some lover of books for their antiquity in your vicinity.

ROSA.—The duties of a Secretary to a limited company are generally keeping accounts, registering names, sending out circulars and prospectuses, and balancing accounts, and carrying out the requirements of the manager and committee.

T. C.—We have no means of knowing where certificates of death are lodged at Ballarat. There are no papers specially used for such advertisements. You can only obtain the information you seek by inquiring in all likely directions.

TIL' DEATH.

MAKE me no vows of constancy, dear friend—
 To love me, though I die, thy whole life-long.
 And love no other till thy days shall end—
 Nay—it were rash and wrong.

If thou can't love another, be it so;
 I would not reach out of my quiet grave
 To bind thy heart, if it should choose to go.
 Love should not be a slave.

My placid ghost, I trust, will walk serene
 In clearer light than glids these earthly morns,
 Above the jealousies and cavies keep.
 Which sow this life with thorns.

Thou would'st not feel my shadowy cares,
 If, after death, my soul should linger here;
 Men's hearts carve fragile, close tenderness.
 Love's presence warm and near.

It would not make me sleep more peacefully
 That thou wert wasting all thy life in woe
 For my poor sake; what love thou hast for me,
 Bestow it ere I go.

Carve not upon a stone when I am dead
 The praises which remorseful mourners give
 To women's graves—a tardy recompense—
 But speak them while I live.

Heap not the heavy marble on my head,
 To shut away the sunshine and the dew;
 Let small blooms grow there, and the grasses wave,
 And rain-drops filter through.

Thou wilt meet many fairer and more gay
 Than I—but trust me, thou can'st never find
 One who will love and serve thee, night and day,
 With a more single mind.

Forget me when I die; the violets
 Above my rest will blossom just as blue,
 Nor miss thy tears; ev'n Nature's self forgets;
 But while I live be true.

R. W.—The difficulty is that any preparation, such as a mild solution of chloride of lime, which might be used for the purpose, is as likely to destroy the blanket as remove the stain; what plenty of good warm soap lather will not remove is fixed.

A COMING STAR.—If you are willing to put your pride away and your intolerance, if you have any, and go on the stage in some ordinary capacity, you may stand some chance of becoming a star. If you wait to be starred you will probably die waiting.

ANTIQUARY.—There is no history; Taylor is a name from occupation, like many others, such as Smith, Baker, Gardener, Farmer, and the like; these had not a distant origin, but came into existence spontaneously in many localities, to suit convenience.

ROVER.—The natives in Straits Settlements are Malays, inoffensive people usually, but subject to occasional fits of wild passion; plenty of Scotch and English in the locality; Penang is a large island, belonging to the British Government; climate very healthy, the place is a favourite resort for invalids.

UNDECIDED.—The time taken in learning type-writing altogether depends on the capability of the learner, and the flexibility of the fingers. The usual charge is from 1s. to 1s. 3d. per 1,000 words type written. By this you can calculate what might be made by a worker in constant employment and of average speed.

D. W.—A stewardess is a housemaid with a little of lady's maid thrown in; far better that you should go into domestic service, as you cannot be always sailing, and you would find that your sea experience told against you when afterwards seeking a situation on shore; must apply in writing to manager of the company.

AN ANXIOUS MOTHER.—Before you find fault with your boys for their raving dispositions why not look closely into your own conduct and see if you have made home sufficiently attractive for them? You cannot have home-loving sons and daughters unless you take pains to keep them.

HAL.—There is not a spot on the face of the earth where you can go with the certainty of finding immediate employment; if you emigrate at all you must not only face the drudgery of having to go about idle, living on your "home-grown" means until you fall into a job, but must be ready to accept any kind of job that offers.

INDIGNATION.—In the case of a youth nineteen years of age "able to work, but unwilling to do so," his father is not obliged to find him lodging or maintenance, nor would he be responsible for any debt the son might contract. If, however, the youth became chargeable to the parish, the father would be required to contribute to his support.

SUGAR-BABY.—The habit of sugar eating is very injurious to the health, as it soon produces indigestion in a most painful form, destroys the appetite, and corrodes the teeth; we advise you to keep a lemon handy, and the moment the craving besets suck the fruit; that is excellent in itself, and it will in a short time kill your desire for sugar.

DANDY.—No sensible person will ever wear a single eyeglass unless he is blind of one eye. Its use means that one eye is neither employed nor unemployed, but is engaged in ceaseless, though no doubt unconscious, efforts to see as much as its more favoured fellow. This straining is as harmful as anything could well be, and cannot fail to lead to the gravest results.

S. E. T.—The Swedish movement cure is not by any means a new method of treating disease. The theory of it seems to be, in part at least, the equivalent of exercise, without the exertion which often wears the patient and does more harm than good. Massage is a similar theory and practice, and, while highly commended by some physicians, is not approved by others.

KATHLEEN.—There were many kings in Ireland; the first of whom there is an authentic record was Heber, son of Milestus, an invader; hence the name Milesians sometimes given to Irishmen; he was a Celt, and under the Celts the system of government was an archaic one, with sub-kings, or princes ruling the provinces; for several centuries the O'Neills of Ulster were the recognised family, holding sway over the entire island; later the country was ruled by four separate kings.

IN DESPAIR.—To destroy blackbeetles, in the first place stop up every crevice with plaster of Paris; then pour down your drains pails of water in which chloride of lime has been dissolved—you cannot use too much lime—and, lastly, sprinkle over the floor near where the beetles frequent oatmeal mixed with plaster of Paris. By persevering in this treatment, particularly in the first part of it, you will soon rid your house of the pests. If people understood that it is dirt which encourages these disgusting creatures they would take more pains to be clear of them.

AMATEUR GARDENER.—In arranging flowers in a garden it is recommended that blue flowers be placed next to the orange, and the violet next to the yellow, while red and pink flowers are never seen to greater advantage than when surrounded by verdure and by white flowers. The latter may also be advantageously dispersed among groups of blue and orange, and violet and yellow flowers. Plants whose flowers are to produce a contrast should be of the same size, and in many cases the colour of the sand or gravel walks or beds of a garden should be made to conduce to the general effect.

YANKEE DOODLE.—The tune of "Yankee Doodle" is probably of Dutch origin. It is asserted by some authorities that a tune strongly resembling "Yankee Doodle" is still a harvest song in Holland. It is known to have been familiar in England in the reign of Charles I., when it used to be sung to such words as:

Lacy Locket lost her pocket,
 Kitty Fisher found it;
 Nothing in it, nothing in it,
 But the binding round it.

It is said to have been played by the English troops at the period of the American Revolution, and in one version of the Yankee melody, which tells of the destruction of the tea in Boston harbour, this tune is distinctly referred to as having been taken from the English:

We kept the tune, but not the tea;
 Yankee doodle dandy.

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